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ALICE WILDE;

THE RAFTSMAN'S DAUGHTER.

A FOREST ROMANCE.

BY MRS. M. V. VICTOR,

AUTHOR OF DIME NOVEL No. 448, "THE TWO HUNTERS."

NEW YORK:
BEADLE AND ADAMS, PUBLISHERS,
No. 98 WILLIAM STREET.

Entered according to Act of Congress, in the Year 1880, by
IRWIN P. BRADLE & CO.,
In the Clerk's Office of the District Court of the United States for the
Southern District of New York.

ALICE WILDE.

CHAPTER I.

THE CABIN HOME.

"THAT ar' log bobs 'round like the old sea-sarpint," muttered Ben Perkins to himself, leaning forward with his pole-hook and trying to fish it, without getting himself too deep in the water. "Blast the thing! I can't tackle it no how;" and he waded in deeper, climbed on to a floating log, and endeavored again to catch the one which so provokingly evaded him.

Ben was a "hand" employed in David Wilde's saw-mill, a few rods further up the creek; a young fellow not without claims to admiration as a fine specimen of his kind and calling. His old felt-hat shadowed hair as black as an Indian's, and made the swarthy hue of his face still darker; his cheeks and lips were red, and his eyes blacker than his hair. The striped wammus bound at the waist by a leather belt, and the linen trowsers rolled up to the knees, were picturesque in their way and not unbecoming the lithe, powerful figure.

Ben had bobbed for saw-logs a great many times in his life and was a person too quick and dextrous to meet with frequent accidents; but upon this day, whether the sudden sight of a tiny skiff turning the bend of the river just below and heading up the creek threw him off his guard, or what it was, certain it is that, stretching forward after that treacherous log, he lost his balance and fell into the water. He did not care for the ducking, but he cared for the eyes which saw him receive it; his ears tingled and his cheeks burned as he heard the silvery laugh which greeted his misfortune. Climbing up on to a log again, he stood dripping like a merman and blushing like a peony, as the occupant of the boat rowed nearer.

"Keep out the way them logs, Miss Alice, or ye'll get npsot!" he cried, glad of an excuse for attracting attention from his own mishap.

"I can take care of myself, thank you," was the gay answer. "Do you see father's boat coming, anywhere in sight, Ben? He was to be home this afternoon; and I took a fancy to go down and meet him."

"I don't see nuthin' of it. That war a mighty big raft he took down to Center City; the biggest raft that ever floated on that river, I reckon. He mought not be home for two or three days yet, Miss Alice. Gorry! but won't he hev a heap of money when he sells that ar' raft!"

"And he'll be sure to bring me something pretty—he always does."

"He knows what's what," responded Ben, stealing a sidelong, admiring glance at the sweet young face in the skiff.

If a compliment was intended, it was not understood by the hearer.

"Yes, father always knows *just* what suits me best. Dear father! I hope he *will* come home to-night. I've been out picking blackberries for supper—just look at my hands," and she held up two pretty, dimpled hands, as if to show how charming they were, instead of to betray the purple-tipped fingers.

But Alice Wilde did not know they were pretty, in sober truth, for she had never been praised, flattered, nor placed in a situation where she could institute comparisons.

"Well, Ben, good-by. I shall float down the river a few miles, and if I don't see him, I can row back alone."

"You're mighty pert with the oars, for a gal. I never see'd no woman 't could row a boat like you, Miss Alice."

"Thank you," she said, with a bright smile, as she turned her little birchen skiff about and struck out into the river again.

Ben watched that graceful form until it was out of sight, heaving a sigh as he turned again to his work, which told how absorbed he had been.

Drifting down the river, under the shadow of precipitous bluffs, while the sunshine flecked with gold the rolling prairie-land upon the opposite side, the young girl sung wild negro melodies which she had learned of the two old colored people who formed her father's retinue of house-servants. Rich and clear, her voice floated through those beautiful solitudes, heard only by the envious birds in the trees which overtopped the bluffs.

Presently she had listeners, of whom she was unaware. An abrupt bend in the river hid from her the little boat with its single sail, fluttering like a butterfly against the current. It held two persons—David Wilde, the owner and captain of the raft of which Ben had spoken, a rough, striking-looking man of middle age, attired in a pink calico shirt and brown linen jacket and trousers, who sat at the tiller smoking his pipe; and a young man of four and twenty, extremely good-looking and fashionably dressed.

"What's that?" exclaimed the latter, as the sweet voice thrilled over the water.

"That's herself, sure," replied the raftsman, listening; "she's comin' to meet me, I reckon. It's just like her."

"And who's 'herself'?" queried the other, laughing.

"My cub, sir. Won't yer take yer flute out of yer pocket and give her a tune, before she sees us? It'll set her to wonderin' what 'n earth it is."

The young man put the pieces of his flute together, and joined in the strain, rising loud and exultant upon the breeze; the

voiced ceased; he stopped playing; the voice began, and again he accompanied it; it sung more exuberantly than ever, and the flute blent in with it accordantly.

It was not until they were nearly upon her fairy bark that they came in sight of the singer, her bright hair flying, her cheeks redder than roses with the double exercise of rowing and singing. Philip Moore thought he had never beheld so lovely an apparition.

"Oh, father, I'm so glad you're home again. Did you hear that beautiful echo?" she asked, her eyes all aglow with surprise and pleasure. "I never heard any thing like it before. It must be the rocks."

"Twan't the rocks—'twas this here gentleman," said David Wilde, smiling. "Mr. Moore, this is my daughter Alice."

Unknown to himself, his tone and look were full of pride as he presented her to his companion, who never paid a more sincere tribute of admiration to any woman, however accomplished, than he did to the artless child who returned his deep bow with so divine a blush.

"I thought I'd come to meet you, and run a race home with you," she said to her father, with a fond look.

"That's just like my little cub—allers on hand. Wal, go ahead! the breeze is fair, and I guess we'll beat ye. Hope ye'll make good time, fur I'm beginning to get growly in the region of the stomach."

"Pallas expects you," returned Alice, laughing.

"If your skiff were large enough for two, I'd take those oars off your hands," said the young gentleman.

"Nobody ever touches this but myself;" and away sped the fairy affair with its mistress, darting ahead like an arrow, but presently dropping behind as they tacked, and then shooting past them again, the young girl stealing shy glances, as she passed, at the stranger who was watching her with mingled curiosity and admiration. So sweetly bashful, yet so arch and piquant—so rustic, yet so naturally graceful—so young, he could not tell whether she esteemed herself a child or a woman—certainly she was very different from the dozen of tow-headed children he had taken it for granted must run wild about the "cabin" to which he was now about to make a visit.

"How many children have you, Mr. Wilde?"

"She's all. That's my mill you see just up the mouth of the creek thar. We're nigh on to my cabin now; when we've rounded that p'int we shall heave in sight. Seems to me I smell supper. A cold snack is very good for a day or two, but give me suthin' of Pallas' getting up after it. Thar's the cabin!"

Philip had been following with his eyes the pretty sailor, who had already moored her craft to the foot of a huge elm, overhanging the gravelly shore from a sloping bank above, and now stood in the shadow of the tree awaiting them.

If it had not been for the blue smoke curling up in thin wreaths from a stick chimney which rose up in the rear, he would hardly have discovered the dwelling at first sight—a little one-story log-house, so completely covered with clambering vines that it looked like a green mound. Tartarian honey-suckles waved at the very summit of the chimney, and wild roses curtained every window.

Taking upon herself the part of hostess, Alice led the way to the house. Philip was again agreeably surprised as he entered it. He had read of squatter life, and considered himself "posted" as to what to expect—corn-bread and bacon, an absence of forks and table-cloths, musketoes, the river for a wash-basin, sand for soap, the sun for a towel, and the privilege of sharing the common bed. But upon entering the cabin, he found himself in a large room, with two smaller apartments partitioned from the side; the cooking to be done in a shanty in the rear. The table was set in the center of the room, with a neat cloth, and a great glass plate, heaped with blackberries, stood upon it, and was surrounded by a wreath of wild-flowers woven by the same dimpled hands which had managed the oars so deftly.

"Clar to gracious, masser, you took us unbeknown."

The new speaker was an old negro woman, portly and beaming, who appeared at the back door, crowned with a yellow turban, and bearing in her left hand that scepter of her realm, the rolling-pin.

"But not unprepared, hey, Pallas?"

"Wal, I dunno, masser. I didn't spec' the pickaninny 'ud eat more'n *one* roas' chicken. But thar's two in de oven; for, to tell de trute, masser, I had a sense dat you war a-comin'; and I know'd if you wasn't, me and my ole man wouldn't be afraid of two fowls."

"But I've brought home company, Pallas."

"Hev you now, masser? I'se mighty glad to hear it. I'd as soon wait on masser's frien's as to sing de Land of Canaan. Yer welcome," she added, dropping a courtesy to the guest with as much importance as if she were mistress of the house—as, in fact, she had been, in most matters, for many long years. He made her a deep and gracious bow, accompanied by a smile which took her old heart by storm.

Retreating to the kitchen outside, where Saturn, her husband, had been pressed into service, and sat with an apron over his knees paring potatoes, buoyed up by the promise of roast chicken from his wife, she told him, as she rolled and cut out her biscuits:

"The finest gentlem she had sot eyes on sence she left ole Virginny. His smile was enough to melt buttah—jas' de smile what a sweet-mannered young gentlem ought to have. She was mighty glad," she added, in a mysterious whisper, "dat er pickaninny was no older."

"Wha' for?" queried Saturn, pausing, with a potato on the end of his knife, and a look of hopeless darkness on his face, barring the expanding whites of his eyes.

"You nebbah could see tru a grin'stone till I'd made a hole in it for yer. It's a wonder I tuk up wid such an ole fool as you is, Saturn. If yer eyes were wurf half as much as dem pertaters' eyes, yer could see for yerself. Hasn't masser swore agin dem city gentleum?"

"He swore—dat's so."

"And he never would forgive one as would come and steal away his precious child—nebbah!" continued Pallas, lifting her rolling-pin threateningly at the bare thought. "If he war rich as gold, and lubbed her to distruction, 'twouldn't make a speck o' difference. He's jealous of the very ground she walks on; and he hates dem smooof-spoken-city folks."

"Do you suspec' he's a kidnapper—dat ar' vis'ter?" asked Saturn, his eyes growing still bigger, and looking toward the door as if he thought of the possibility of the handsome young stranger carrying *him* off.

"You is born a fool, and you can't help it. Put 'em 'taters in de pot, and mind yer own bisness. I want some more wood for dis fish—immejetly!"

When Pallas said "immejetly!" with that majestic air, there was nothing left for her worser half save to obey, and he retreated to the wood-pile with alacrity. On going out he run against Ben Perkins, who had been standing by the open door, unperceived, for the last five minutes.

"Why, Ben, dat you?" asked Pallas, good-naturedly, not dreaming that he had overheard her confidential conversation.

"Yes; I came up to the house to see if Captain Wilde had any orders for the mill to-night. I see him when he passed the creek. Who's with him, Pallas?"

The old colored woman gave a sudden sharp glance at the youth's troubled face.

"It's a frien' for all I know. What bisness is it of yours to be askin'?"

"I s'pose I hain't no business. Do you think it's likely it's anybody as expects to marry Miss Alice?" His voice trembled.

"Marry Miss Alice! What a simpl'un you is, Ben. Wha's that pickaninny but a chile yet, I'se like to know? a little chit as don't know nothin' 'bout marryin' nobody. 'Sides that, long as her fadder libs, she'll never marry, not if it war a king. He'd be mad as fury ef any one was to dar' to speak of such a thing. Humf! my pickaninny, indeed!" with an air of scorn and indignation deeply felt by the youth, whose face was flushing beneath the implied rebuke. "Ef you'll stop a few minutes, I'll give yer some of dese soda biscuits," she said, after a brief silence, secretly pitying a trouble at which she had shrewdly guessed, though she resented the audacity of the hope from which it

sprung. "Dat ar' man-cook what gets up the vittles for the mill-hands can't make sech biscuits as mine. Stop now, and hab some, won't yer?"

"Thank ye, Pallas, I ain't hungry," was the melancholy reply—melancholy when proceeding from a hearty, hardworking young man, who *ought* to have been hungry at that hour of the day. He turned away, and without even going to the cabin-door to inquire of Mr. Wilde as he had proposed, struck into the pine-woods back of the garden-patch.

CHAPTER II.

PALLAS AND SATURN.

SUPPER was over, and David Wilde was cutting with his jack-knife the strings of several packages which had accompanied him on his trip back from Center City, where he had disposed of his raft. His guest sat upon a wooden settle, as much interested as the others in the proceedings, though his eyes were fixed mostly upon the happy girl, who, with all of her sex's love of finery, was upon her knees on the floor, assisting, with smiling eyes and eager fingers, at the pleasant task of bringing forth the contents of these packages. A dark-blue dress of the finest merino, a rich shawl, and some pretty laces for collars and ruffles rewarded her search. There was another package which was all her own, with which she was equally delighted; it was made up of a dozen of books, whose titles she eagerly read before she continued her explorations.

"Here's a dress Mr. Moore picked out for you," said the raftsmen, maliciously, unfolding a gorgeous red and yellow calico.

"But I hadn't seen you, you know," returned Philip, coloring.

At this moment Pallas, who had an eye upon the bundles, came in on a pretense of clearing off the table.

"Come and look at my beautiful presents, Pallas," cried her young mistress.

"You've got little les'n an angel fer a fadder, my dear chile," ejaculated that personage, catching sight of the calico from the corner of her eye while admiring the merino.

Alice looked up into the rough, sunburnt face of her father with a smile; the idea of his being an angel was not so ludicrous to her as it was to their guest.

"Here's somethin' to help you along with yer sewing," continued David, taking a little box containing a gold thimble from his jacket-pocket. "See if it fits," and he placed it on the little fair hand.

"It sets to your finger like a cup to an acorn," exclaimed

Pallas. "Thar's none like masser to tell peccisly what a person is a-wishin' fer," and again her covert glance sought the calico.

"Sartainly, old girl; no doubt," chuckled the raftsmen. "If that is the case, jist take them handkerchiefs and that dress-pattern and give 'em to Saturn. You can keep the vest and the tobaccoer and the boots yerself, and especially the trowsers—you've allers worn 'em!"

"Jaws, masser, ef I *hadn't*, things would a gone to rack and ruin long ago. Dat nigger of mine no use, but to sleep hisself to death. He's a great cross to me, Saturn is," and with a profusion of smiles and thanks she carried off her booty to the kitchen, graciously dispensing his share to her "ole man," and condescending to be unusually affable.

"Ef we only had a camp-meetin' to go to now," she said, spreading out the new jacket and trowsers beside the calico. "It's four year, come nex' moni, sence we went to dat meetin' down de river. I declar' it's jes' like de heathen fer decent celled pusses not to have any place to holler Glory, and show der new clo'es."

"I'd like to go to meetin' wid dese boots," remarked her spouse, looking down at the immense pair into which he had squeezed his feet.

"Ef you did, all I can say is, dar' would be no room for anybody else dar'," returned Pallas, giving way, by mere force of habit, to her custom of snubbing her companion.

"Wha' fer?" inquired Saturn.

"No matter, ef yer don't know. My! my!"—hopelessly—"what a fool you is!"

"Dat's so, wife," was the humble reply, "but," picking up courage at the sight of his new rig, "mebbe when I get my new jacket on, I'll know more."

"You'd better put it on quick, den, and nether take it off."

When her dishes were washed, Pallas took the calico in her lap and sat down.

"I've a sense," she said, in a low voice, "dat things is goin' to happen."

"Wha' fer?"

"I haven't had such a sense fer years," she continued, too preoccupied to maintain her customary reticence. "And when I've a sense, it alers comes to suthin'—it never fails. I haven't had such a sense sence my husband died. 'Peas to me dat young gentelman he's like his father finally. And it's de same name—carius isn't it?"

"He is," replied Saturn, at random, lost in the study of his feet; "dem boots is beauties."

"I know what masser brought him here fer, he's allus been so ke'nal. He told me 'twasn a pardner in de steam saw-mill dat takes his lumber off his han's; a young storekeeper in Center City now, though he use to be a lawyer in New York—bress

it! It's a long time since I sot eyes on dat city now. Our fus' masser, Mortimer Moore, usin to invite no shopkeepers to his house. My! my! but he was a mighty proud man, and dat's what made all de trouble. Dem was grand times, wid all de serbents and de silber—never t'ought I ead come to dis—but I promised missus, when she died, I'd stan' by her chile, and I shall stand by her, long as der's any bref left in dis ole body—bress her! She's growing up jes' as han'some as ever her mother was, and she's got her ways; and as for manners—hi! hi! folks might larf at the idea of ole Pallas learnin' manners to her massens, but dar, ain't nobody knows better how table ought to be set and sarbed, and things to be done, than my dear chile now, dis minit. Ef masser *will* keep her, like de children of Israel, forty years in de wilderness, she shall be a lady for all dat, bress her, and a Christian lady, too! She knows all de bes' part of de psalms by heart, now; and she can sing hymns like a cherubim. Sometimes I mos' think she's got one of dem golden harps in her hand. If dat ole fool ain't asleep. Saturn!" kicking his shins, "wake up yer, and go to bed—immedjetly!"

Saturn had a discouraging time getting his new boots off in the sleepy state which had come upon him; but this being at last accomplished, and he safely lodged in bed, which took up the greater portion of Pallas' settin'-room," off her kitchen, she stole out to the corner of the house to "spy out the land," in Bible language, which, to her, sheltered the deed from opprobrium. Pallas was no mischief-making listener; she considered herself entitled to know all that transpired in the family, whose secrets she kept, and whose welfare she had in her heart.

"My! my! they make a pretty pictur' sittin' dar' in de light ob de moon," she thought, peeping at the group, now gathered outside of the door, enjoying the glory of a most brilliant August moon. The young stranger was telling some story of foreign adventure, his fine face and animated gestures showing well in the pure light, while the old railman smoked his pipe to keep away the musketoes, as he said—though they were not particularly troublesome in that neighborhood—and Alice sat on the step at his feet, her arms folded over his knee, her eager, girlish face lifted to the story-teller.

"He sartainly belongs to *our* family of Moores, ef he ain't no nearer than a forty-second cousin," whispered Pallas to herself. "Masser don't know 'em, root and branch, as well as I do, else he'd see it right away. How that pickaninny is a watchin' of him talk! Laws! nobody knows what they're doin in' dis yere worl', or we'd all act different."

As she stood there, taking observations, she thought she saw a person in the shade of the great elm on the bank; and not being afraid of any thing but "ghostesses" and "sprites," she went back to the kitchen for a bucket, as an excuse for going down to the river and finding out who it was.

"Ef it's that yer young Perkins, won' I let him know what a fool he's making of hisself—he, indeed! —Gerry! I'll give a seolding 'at'll las' him his lifetime." But she had no opportunity of venting her indignation, as the form, whosoever it was, slipped down the bank, and ran away along the wet sand, taking shelter behind a ledge of rock, before she could recognize it.

"My! my! dis ole bucket full of siber," she ejaculated, as she lifted it out of the river, glittering in the moonlight. "Dis yere ribber looks laddy as de stream of life dat's flowin' round de streets ob Paradise, to night!" and the good old creature stood watching the barnished ripples. The rush of waters and the murmur of the pine forest were sweet even to her ears.

"It's a bad night for young folks to be sittin' out-o-doors," she reflected, shaking her yellow turban suggestively, as she looked at the two by the cabin-door.

But let us go back a little way with our story.

CHAPTER III.

REJECTED ADDRESSES.

Through the spacious lengths of a suite of richly-furnished rooms, a woman was wandering, with that air of nervous restlessness which betokens a mind ill at ease. The light stealing in soft tints through the curtains, fell upon many pictures and objects of taste and art, and all that lavish richness of plenishing to which wealthy Gothamites are prone—but upon nothing so beautiful as the mistress of them all, who now moved from place to place, lifting a costly toy here, pausing before a picture there, but really interested in neither.

"Virginia!"

Her cousin Philip had come in through the library so silently that she was unaware of his presence until he spoke, although she was waiting for him which made her so uneasy.

"Well, Philip?"

She had started when he spoke her name, but recovered her haughty self-possession immediately.

"Sit down, please, on this sofa. I can not talk to you when you are standing. You look too cool and too imperious. I have come to-day for your answer, Virginia."

They sat upon the sofa together, he turning so as to read her face, which was bent down as she played with the diamond ring upon her finger. She looked cool and quiet enough to dampen the ardor of her lover; but he was so absorbed in his own feelings that he could not and would not understand it.

"Speak, Virginia! I can not bear this suspense."

Still she hesitated; she *liked* him too well to take any pleasure in giving him pain, frivolous coquette though she was.

"I have questioned my heart closely, Philip, as you bade me," she began after a few moments, "and I have satisfied myself that I can never be happy as the wife of a poor man."

"Then you do not love me! Love does not put itself in the scales and demand to be balanced with gold."

"But gold is very necessary to its welfare and long life. No, Philip, I do not know that I love you—perhaps I do not, since I am not willing to make this sacrifice. I certainly think better of you than of any other living man, except my father; I would rather marry you than any other man, if you had the wealth necessary to support me in the station for which only I am fated. A young man, with nothing to rely upon but the profession of the law, in a great city like this, must expect to wait some time before he can pour many honors and much wealth into the lap of the woman he loves."

"You are sarcastic, Virginia."

"No, only practical. My father is not so rich as in days gone by. His fortune has dwindled until it is barely sufficient to keep up the house in the old style. If I would still preserve the family pride, still rule queen of the circle I have brought around me, I must marry rich."

"And for this you must resign a love like mine?"

"It is my nature, Philip—born in me, cherished in me. My father, I know, would not listen to the match, as likely as he esteems you. I had a sister—a woman when I was a child—you remember her, do you not? She married against his will—inmarried poor, and tried this 'love in a cottage' sentiment. He never forgive her, and she never prospered; she is dead, poor thing, and I do not care to emulate her."

"Haugh! I am to understand that your father then rears his children as slaves, to be sold to the highest bidder—that you hold yourself ready for the market?"

"Don't provoke me, Philip." The black eyes were fixed upon him haughtily.

"Forgive me, Virginia. I am half-mad just now, you know. You can not say that you have not encouraged me."

"Perhaps I have—shown you the affection of a cousin. I have felt as if you were one of the family. I might even have, felt a still closer interest, had I allowed myself. But I am—what you never will be—prudent. I may yet see some one whom I can really respect and love, who has also the fortune you lack; if not, I shall accept some one for glory's sake, and let the love go! Don't look so scornful, Phil. I have beauty, fashion, pride of place, family, every thing but the means wherewith to set these off magnificently; and this has made me ambitious. Dear Philip, much as I like you, I could never be contented to await your slow promotion."

"Prudence is very commendable, Virginia. Its maxims fall with double force from lips as beautiful as yours. I will try to learn it. I, a man, upon whom such cold duties are supposed most naturally to devolve, will be taught by you, a soft, tender woman, who looks as if made for the better purpose of loving and teaching love. Farewell! When you see me again, perhaps I shall rival you in prudence."

"You are not going away, cousin Philip?" He was already opening the door into the hall, as she followed him and caught his hand.

"Oh, yes, I am. Since only rich men can possess the happiness such gentle creatures have it in their power to bestow, I must make haste after wealth," and he looked down bitterly at the proud girl over whose face was coming a faint expression of remorse and relenting.

"Shall I not hear from you?" she asked, quite humbly.

"No; not until I am in a fair way to achieve that which will recommend me to your *disinterested affection*!"

He withdrew his hand from her clasp, and went out with a quick, resounding step, which told of the firmness of his resolution. The girl who had rejected him sunk down in the nearest seat. She had never seen him look more—as a woman is proud to have a man look—handsome, self-reliant, determined, than in the hour of his disappointment. Two or three tears trickled through her jeweled fingers; she shook them off impatiently.

"He is a man who would never have shamed my choice," she whispered. "But I have decided for the best. I know my own disposition; I should fret at the chains which limited my power. And I am used to every indulgence. I am selfish. Poor Phil! if somebody would present you with a check for half a million, I'd marry you to-morrow."

In the mean time Philip Moore, all the dregs stirred up from the bottom of the fountain in his usually transparent soul, hurried to the office which he had just set up in Wall street. There, as if in answer to the wish which had been aroused, he found a letter from a friend who had emigrated westward three years previous, forsaking the law for speculations in pine lands and lumber, merchandise, etc. He was doing well, was getting rich in seven or eight strides, had married a pretty western girl, was happy—and gone to horse-keeping, wanted a partner in business as well as domestic affairs—recommended Philip to accept the offer—seven thousand dollars would be all the capital required.

Philip sold seven thousand dollars in stocks; he sold out, shook off the dust from his feet as he left the great metropolis, and answered his friend's letter in person in less than a fortnight.

Virginia Moore missed the convenient escort, the constant attentions, and the profound worship of her high-hearted cousin; but a rich Spaniard, ugly and old, was come into the market,

and she was among the bidders. Let us leave Virginia Moore, and return to that western wilderness, where a certain little girl looks lovelier, in her blue gingham dress and wild-flower wreath, than the other in all the family diamonds.

CHAPTER IV

BEN PERKINS.

THE day after her father's return, Alice Wilde sat down to try her new thimble in running up the skirt of her merino dress. The frock which she wore, and all the others, probably, were fashioned in the style of twenty years ago—short under the arms; a belt at the waist; low in the neck; full, puffed, short sleeves; narrow skirt, and no crinoline. Her profuse hair, when it was not allowed to fall in a golden torrent around her neck, was looped up in the quaint style which marked the fashion of her dress. She looked like the portrait, come to life, of some republican belle and beauty of long ago. Quite unconscious that this ancient style had been superseded by the balloons of to-day, she measured off the three short breadths which, when hemmed, would leave her pretty ankles exposed, even as they now, with the slippered feet, peeped from her scanty gingham.

If Philip Moore had understood the mantuamaker's art, and had possessed "patterns" of the latest mode, he would not have instructed his hostess in any changes, she looked so picturesque and quaint as she was. But he did not let her sew very steadily that day. He wanted to explore the surroundings of the cabin, and she was his ready, intelligent guide.

They went back into the forest, through which thundered, ever and anon, the crash of a falling tree; for many men were busy cutting timber for another raft, on which, at its completion, Philip was to return to Center City. His business would not have detained him more than three or four days, but he was in no haste; he wanted to hunt and fish a little, and he liked the novelty of the idea of floating down the river on a raft of logs in company with a score of rough fellows. Although David Wilde sawed up some of his timber himself, his old-fashioned mill was not equal to the supply, and he sent the surplus down to the steam saw-mills, one of which was owned by Philip and his partner.

It called forth all his affability to conquer the shyness of his pretty guide, who at last dared to look full into his face with those brilliant blue eyes, and to tell him where the brook made the sweetest music, where the fawns came oftenest to drink, where the violets lingered the latest, and where there was a grape-vine swing.

Both of them looked very happy when they came in, just in time to meet Mr. Wilde at the supper-table, who had been at the mill all day. He did not seem in such good spirits. Some new thought troubled him. His keen, gray eyes scanned the countenance of his child, as if searching for something hitherto undiscovered; and then turned suspiciously to the stranger, to mark if he, too, held the same truth. For the first time it occurred to him, that his "cub," his pet, was no longer a little girl—that he might have done something fatally foolish in bringing that fine city aristocrat to his cabin. Had he not always hated and despised those dandified caricatures of men?—despised their vanity, falsehood, and affectation?—hated their vices, their kid-gloves, their perfumed handkerchiefs, and their fashionable nonsense? Yet, pleased with the result of them, and on a mere matter of business, he had, without the wisdom of a fool, much less of a father, brought one of that very class to his house. How angry he was with himself his compressed lip alone revealed, as he sharply eyed his guest. Yet the laws of hospitality were too sacred with him to allow of his showing any rudeness to his guest, as a means of getting rid of him.

Unconscious of the bitter jealousy in her father's heart, Alice was as gay as a humming-bird. She had never been happier. We are formed for society; children are charmed with children, and youth delights in youth. Alice had been ignorant of this sweet want, until she learned it now, by having it gratified. For, although she had passed pleasant words with such young men as chanced to be employed by her father, they had never seemed to her like companions, and she naturally adopted the reserve which her father also used with them. His cabin was his castle. No one came there familiarly, except upon invitation. The "hands" were all fed and lodged in his house by themselves, near the mill. The gloom of the host gradually affected the vivacity of the others; and the whole household retired early to rest.

The next day Philip set off to the mill with Mr. Wilde, carrying on his shoulders the excellent rifle of the latter, as he proposed, after business was over, to make a search for deer, now nearly driven away from that locality by the sound of the ax in those solitudes once so deep and silent.

"Tell Aunt Pallas I bring her a haunch of venison for supper," he said gayly to the young girl, touching his straw hat with a grace that quite confused her.

She looked after them wistfully as they went away. She felt lonely; her sewing fatigued her; the sun was too hot to go out on the water; she didn't know what to do. Even her new books failed for once to keep her interested many hours. When Pallas looked for her to help pick over berries to dry, she was not to be found. She had sought that delightful refuge of early youth—the garret; which in this instance was but a loft over

the main story, reached by a ladder, and seldom resorted to by any one, except when the raftsmen stored away a bear-skin, a winter's store of nuts, or something of the kind. To-day Alice felt powerfully attracted toward a certain trunk which had stood in that garret ever since she could remember. It was always locked; she had never seen it open; and did not know its contents. Now, for a wonder, the key was in the lock; she never thought of there being any thing wrong in the act, as she had never heard the trunk mentioned, and had never been forbidden access to it, and lifting the lid, she sat down beside it and began an examination of its mysteries. Lifting up a napkin spread over the top, she was met by a lovely face, looking up at her from the ivory upon which it was so exquisitely painted. The breath died upon her lips.

"It must be my mother's; how very beautiful she was—my mother!"

Hot tears rushed up into her eyes at this life-like vision of a being she did not remember, of whom old Pallas often spoke, but whom her father seldom mentioned—never, save in the most intimate moments of their association. She was sorry she had opened the trunk, realizing at once that if her father had desired her to know of the miniature he would have shown it to her years ago; she had a glimpse of a white silk dress, some yellow lace, a pair of white silk slippers, and long, white kid gloves, but she would not gratify the intense curiosity and interest which she felt. She remembered hearing her father descend from the garret late in the preceding night; and she guessed now the purpose of his visit.

An impulse was given to her thoughts which drove away her restless mood; she retreated from the loft, and sat very quietly to work helping Pallas with the blackberries. She was sitting in the kitchen-door, an apron on, and a large bowl in her lap, when Philip Moore came through the pines, dragging after him a young deer which he had slain. Pallas was on a bench outside the shanty, and it was at her feet the hunter laid his trophy.

"Bress you, masser Moore, I'se mighty glad you went a huntin'—Miss Alice she laughed and say de deer he ain't be afraid of you, 'cause you was a city gentleman, but I tol' her she didn't know nuffin' about it. I was afraid you'd get tired of white-fish and salmon, and bacon and fowls—dis ven'sen jes' de meat I want."

"Well, Aunt Pallas, I shall claim one of your best pies as my reward," said the amateur hunter, laughing. "But Alice here mustn't think no one can do any thing right except the resters and lumbermen."

"Oh, I don't!" exclaimed she, blushing. "I think you do every thing beautifully, Mr. Moore, that you've been br—up to do, you know—but shooting deer—they don't do that in cities, do they?"

"Not exactly in cities; but there are wild woods near enough New York yet for young men to have a chance at gaining that accomplishment. I suppose you wou'ldn't trust me to take you out sailing, to-morrow, would you?"

"If she wou'ld, yer a'ldn't do it, for I want the boat myself. Captain White's goin' to send me down to the p'int with it."

Mr. Moore looked up in surprise at the speaker, who had just come up from the river, and whose looks and tones were still ruder than his words.

"Hi, Ben! yer as early as a b'ar," spoke up Pallas; "yer haven't a grain of peritiveness in yer body," she added, in a lower tone.

"I leaves peritiveness to them as is wimmen enough to want it," answered Ben, throwing back a glare of defiance and contempt at the innocent stranger, as he stepped into the shanty. "I want them new saws as came home with the capt'n."

"There's somebody that looks upon me in the same light you do," laughed Philip, when the youth had secured the saws and departed.

"Oh, Mr. Moore, you don't know how I look upon you!" she exclaimed, earnestly; neither did he, any more than he knew how the fate of that black-eyed, heavy-browed mill-hand was to be mixed and mingled with his own.

He admired Alice White as he would have done any other pretty and singular young creature; but he never thought of loving her; she was a child in his eyes, ignorant and uneducated in many things, though always graceful and refined; a child, who would be out of place in any other sphere except that peculiar one in which she now moved. He did not guess that in her eyes he was a hero, almost supernatural, faultless, glorious—such as an imaginative girl who had seen nothing of the world, but who had read many poems and much fiction, would naturally create out of the first material thrown in her way.

Not all through that happy fortnight of his visit he talked with her freely, answering her eager questions about the world from which she was so excluded, roamed the woods with her, sailed the river, played his flute, sang favorite love-songs, and all without reflecting upon the deathless impression he was making. Keen eyes were upon him, and saw nothing to justify censure; he would have laughed at the idea of that little girl falling in love with him, if he had thought of it at all; but he did not think of it; sometimes he flirted with her, as if they were both children; and sometimes he kindly took upon himself the pleasant task of teaching her in matters about which she showed an interest. He was touched by her beauty and intelligence; and was extremely guarded in her presence not to let a hint of evil be breathed upon that young soul—her father, Pallas, all who approached her, seemed naturally to pay her parity the same deference.

The raft for which Philip was waiting was now in readiness, and was to commence its drifting journey upon the next day. Alice had fled into the pine-woods, after dinner, to anticipate, with dread, her coming loneliness; for her father was also to accompany it, and would be absent nearly three weeks. Her footsteps wandered to a favorite spot, where the grape-vine swing had held her in its arms, many and many a frolic hour. She sat down in it, swinging herself slowly to and fro. Presently a footfall startled her from her abstraction, and, looking up, she saw Ben Perkins coming along the path with a cage in his hand, of home manufacture, containing a gorgeous forest-bird which he had captured.

"I reckon I needn't go no further, Miss Alice," he said; "I war a bringin' this bird to see if you'd be so agreeable as to take it. I cotched it, yesterday in the wood."

"Oh, Ben, how pretty it is!" she cried, quickly brushing away her tears, that he might not guess what she had been crying about.

"It sings like any thing. It's a powerful fine singer, Miss Alice—I thought mebbe 't would be some comfort to ye, seein' yer about to lose that flute that's been turnin' yer head so."

"What do you mean?—you speak so roughly, Ben."

"I know I ain't particularly smooth-spoken; but I mean what I say, which is more'n some folks do. Some folks thinks it good sport to be telling you fine fibs, I've no doubt."

"Why do you wish to speak ill of those of whom you have no reason to, Ben? It isn't generous."

"But I *have* reason—Oh, Alice, you don't know how much!" He set the bird cage down, and came closer to her. "I've got suthin' to say that I can't keep back no longer. Won't you set down 'side of me on this log?"

"I'd rather stand, Ben," she said, drawing back as he was about to take her hand.

The quivering smile upon his lip when he asked the question changed to a look which half frightened her, at her gesture of refusal.

"You didn't object to settin' by that town chap; you sot here on this very log with him, for I seen you. Cuss him, and his fine clothes, I say?"

"I can not listen to you, Ben, if you use such language; I don't know what's the matter with you to day," and she turned to go home.

"I'll tell you what's the matter, Alice Wilde," and he caught her hand almost fiercely. "I can't keep still any longer and see that feller hangin' 'round. I didn't mean to speak this long-time yet, but that stranger's driven me crazy. Do you s'pose I kin keep quiet and see him smirking and bowin' and blowin' on that blasted flute, around you; and you lookin' at him as if yer couldn't take yer eyes off? Do you s'pose I kin keep quiet and

see him making a simpleton of the purtiest girl that ever grow'd! You needn't wince—it's true; jist as soon as he'd got away from here he'd forget all about you, or only think of you to laugh at your Hoosier ways with some proud lady as fine as himself."

"Oh, I am afraid it's too true!" burst forth Alice, involuntarily.

"Yer may bet yer life on that, Alice Wilde! Or, at the best, he'd take yer away from yer own old father as loves the ground you tread, and try and make a lady of you, and never let you speak to your own flesh and blood ag'in. While I—I wouldn't do nathin' but what yer father wanted; I'd settle down side of him, work for him, see to things, and take the care off his mind when he got old. Yer father hates them proud peacocks, Alice—he *hates* 'em, and so do I! I know he'd rather have me. Say yes, do now, that's a good girl."

"I don't understand you, Ben," said Alice, coldly, trying to pass, for she was troubled and wanted to get away.

"I'll tell you then," he said. "I want you to marry me, Alice. I've been thinking about it these two years—night and day, **night and day.**"

"Why, Ben," cried the startled child, "I never thought of it—never! and I can not now. Father will be very angry with you. Let go of my hand; I want to go home."

"You ain't a little girl any longer, Alice Wilde, and I guess yer father 'll find it out. He may be mad for a spell; but he'll get over it; and when he comes to think of the chances of his dyin' and leavin' yer alone, he'll give his consent. Come, Alice, say yes, do, now."

The intense eagerness of his manner made her tremble, from sympathy, but she looked into his blazing eyes firmly, as she replied, "Never! so long as I live, never! And you must not speak of it again, unless you want to be discharged from—"

"Don't you threaten me, Miss Alice. I ain't the stuff to be threatened. If I'd had said what I've said thisday, three weeks ago, you wouldn't have been so mighty cool. Not that I think I'm good enough for ye—there ain't the man *in* that's that; but I am as good as some as thinks themselves better—and I won't be bluffed off by any broadcloth coat. I've loved you ever since you were a little girl, and fell in the mill-pond once, and I fished ye out. I've loved ye more years than he's seen ye weeks, and I won't be bluffed off. Jes so sure as I live, that man shall never marry you, Alice Wilde."

"He never thought of it; and it hurts me, Ben, to have you speak of it. Let me go now, this instant."

She pulled her hand out of his, and hurried away, forgetful of the bird he had given her.

Love, rage, and despair were in the glance he cast after her; but when, a few moments later, as he made his way back toward the mill, he passed Philip Moore, who gave him a pleasant

careless nod, *hate*—the dangerous hate of envy, jealousy, and ignorance, darkened his swarthy brow.

Poor Alice, nervous almost to trembling, pursued her homeward way. She had never thought of marriage except as a Paradise in some far, Arcadian land of dreams which she had fashioned from books and the instincts of her young heart; and now to have the idea thrust upon her by this rude, determined fellow, who doubtless considered himself her equal, shocked her as a bird is shocked and hurt by the rifle's clamor. And if this young man thought himself a fit husband for her, perhaps others thought the same—perhaps her father would wish her to accept him, some time in their far future—perhaps Philip—ah, Philip! how almost glorified he looked to her vision as at that moment he came out of the forest shadows into the path, his straw hat in his hand, and the wind tossing his brown hair.

"Here is the little humming-bird, at last! Was it kind of her to fly away by herself on this last afternoon of my stay?"

How gay his voice, how beaming his smile, while she was so sad! She felt it and grew sadder still. She tried to reply as gayly, but her lip trembled.

"What's the matter with the little Wilde-rose?" He asked, kindly looking down into the suffused eyes.

"I've been thinking how very lonely I shall be. My father is going away, too, you know, and I shall have no one but good old Pallas."

"And that handsome young man I just saw parting from you," he said, mischievously, looking to see her blush and smile.

"Oh, Mr. Moore, is it possible you think I could care for him?" she asked, with a sudden air of womanly pride which vanished in a deep blush the next instant.

"Well, I don't know; you *are* too good for him," he answered, frankly, as if the idea had just occurred to him.

An expression of pain swept over Alice's face.

"I know, Mr. Moore, how you must regard me; and I can not blame you for it. I know that I am ignorant—a foolish, ignorant child,—that my dress is odd, my manner awkward,—that the world if it should see me, would laugh at me—that my mind is uncultivated,—but oh, Mr. Moore, you do not know how eager I am to learn—how hard I should study! I wish my father would send me away to school."

"That would just spoil your sweet, peculiar charms, little Alice."

He smoothed her hair soothingly, as he would have done a child's; but something in her tone had put a new thought in his mind; he looked at her earnestly as she blushed beneath this first slight caress which he had ever given her. "Can it be so?" he asked himself; and in his eyes the young girl suddenly took more womanly proportions. "How very—how exquisitely beautiful she is now, with the soul glowing through her face

Shall I ever again see a woman such as this—pure as an infant, loving, devoted, unselfish, and so beautiful?" Another face, laughing, clear-cut, with trails of pertained black hair, rose before his mental vision, and took place beside this sweet, troubled countenance. One so unmoved, so determined, even in the moment of giving bitter pain—this other so confiding, so shy, so full of every girlish beauty. Philip was touched—almost to saying something which he might afterward regret; but he was a Moore, and he had his pride and his prejudices, stubborn as old Martin Moore's, nearly. These hardened his heart against the sentiment he saw trembling through that eloquent countenance.

"You are but a little girl yet, and will have plenty of chance to grow wise," he continued, playfully. "This pretty Wilde-rose needs not the foreign aid of ornament." When I come again, I hope to find her just as she is now—unless she should have become the bride of that stalwart forester."

"Then you are coming again?" she asked, ignoring the cruel kindness of the latter part of his speech, and thinking only of that distant future possibility of again seeing and hearing him, again being in his presence, no matter how indifferent he might be to her.

For Alice Wilde, adoring him as no man ever deserved to be adored, still, in her forest simplicity, called not her passion love, nor cherished it from any hope of its being reciprocated. No; she considered herself unworthy of the thought of one so much more accomplished, so much wiser than herself. Hers was

**"The desire of the moth for the star,
Of the night for the morrow ;"**

and now that there was a chance in the future for her to burn her little wings still more cruelly, she grew a shade happier.

"I have business with your father which will bring me here again, perhaps this fall, in October; certainly in the spring. When shall I bring you when I come again, Alice? You've been a kind hostess, and I owe you many happy hours. I should like to make you some trifling return."

She looked up in his face sadly, thinking she should like to ask him to remember her, but she dared not trust herself.

"If you will select some books—such as you think I ought to have, my father will buy them for me."

"Don't you love jewelry and such pretty trinkets as other girls seek after?"

"I really don't know; I've no doubt I could cultivate such a taste," she replied, with some of her native archness.

"I won't try very hard—you're better without," he said, pressing a light kiss on her forehead; and the two went slowly away, walking more silently than was their wont.

Patience saw them, as they came up through the garden, and gave them a scrutinizing look which did not seem to be satisfactory.

"Dat child's trouble's jes' begun," she murmured to herself.

"Ef dese yere ole arms could hide her away from ebery sorrow, Pallas would be happy. But dey can't. Things happen as sure as the worl'; and girls will be girls—it's in em; jes' as sartin as it's in eggs to be chickens, and acorns to be oaks. Hi! Li!"

CHAPTER V.

AN APPALLING VISITOR.

ONE bright September day, after David Wilde had been gone about a week with his raft, a wood-cutter came to the cabin with bad news. He informed Alice that the woods were on fire two or three miles back, and that the wind was driving the fire in a broad belt of a mile wide directly toward the house; that if the wind did not subside with the setting of the sun, nothing could preserve the place from destruction by the middle of the next day. Alice had been sitting at the window, thinking how delicious that soft, dry wind was; but now she prayed with all her heart that it might speedily die. It was yet many hours to sunset; and she, with Pallas, went into the forest until they could see the fire, and were in some danger from the drifting sparks. The foresters shook their heads and told her to be prepared for the worst; Pallas groaned and prayed as if she had been at a camp-meeting; but Alice, although she trembled before the mighty power of the conflagration, endeavored not to lose her presence of mind.

"I shall hope for the best," she said to the men, "but shall be prepared for the worst. Go to the mill and bring round by the river all the skiffs you can muster—there are two or three, are there not? They will be ready by evening, and if the wind does not change, or go down, by that time, we will try and save the furniture by means of the boats. Come, Pallas, let us go home and pack up the smaller things."

"Home!" The word sounded sweet when destruction hovered so near; but Alice had a brave heart; she would think of nothing now but of being equal to the emergency; her calmness had a salutary effect upon the characteristic excitability of her sable attendant, who followed her back in quite a composed and serviceable mood.

Moving quietly about, putting her precious books into packages, and getting into movable shape all those little articles of household use which become so dear from association, a looker-on would hardly have guessed how anxiously the young girl waited for sunset—how earnestly she wished that her father had been at home.

"My my! dat nigger of mine is a wusser fool 'an ever," said Pallas, as she bustled about like an embodied storm; "jes see

him, Miss Alice; he's went and put on his bes' clo'es, and dar' he stan' is, nebber doin' a single t'ing, but jes' holding dem new boots of his."

"What are you dressed up for, Saturn?" called Alice, laughing, in spite of her anxiety, to find that he had made provision for that which was dearest to him—his new suit would be saved if he was, and if he perished, it would share his fate.

"Oh, missus," he replied, looking foolish, "it's the easiest way to carry 'em."

"Better put your boots on, also; then you'll have your hands to work with," suggested Alice.

"Jes' so, missus; I never t'ought of dat;" and on went the boots, after which Saturn was ready to get as much in the way as possible.

At sunset, the boats, consisting of two little skiffs which would hold but small freightage, and one larger boat which would accommodate the heavier pieces of furniture, were moored under the stately old elm which had so long stood sentinel over the forest. Three or four men, among whom was Ben Perkins, held themselves in readiness to give the necessary assistance.

The sun went down in a clear sky; there were no clouds to threaten a wash for rain; but that cold, firm wind which sometimes blows unceasingly three days at a time in the autumn months, rose higher and higher. There was no moon, and as twilight deepened into night, the thick smoke which hung about the earth rendered the darkness intense; and occasionally when heavy volumes of smoke dropped lower toward the earth, the atmosphere was suffocating.

Palmes prepared supper for all, with a strong cup of coffee to keep off drowsiness; and no one retired to bed that night. Shortly after midnight the fire traveled within sight; the roar of the conflagration swelled and deepened until it was like the dashing of a thousand seas; the hot breath of the flames aroused the wind, until it rushed in fury directly toward the cabin. Bright flashes of flame would run from tree-top to tree-top, while farther back was a solid cone of fire—trunks from which all the foliage and lesser branches had fallen, stretching their glowing arms across the darkness, towering up against the starless background. Frequently these fiery columns would crumble, with crashes scarcely heard through the continuous roar, sending up a fatal shower of sparks to be whirled on high by the rushing currents of air.

Fascinated by the beautiful, appalling scene, Alice sat on the bank of the river, wrapped in a shawl, from which her pale, expressionless face shone like a star, kindling the enthusiasm of the rangers about her to do something in her service. As for Ben, he scarcely looked at the fire—his eyes were upon the girl.

"It's no use," he said to her, about two o'clock in the morning, "waitin' any longer. That fire will be on this very spot

by break of day. The wind's a-blowin' a perfect gale. Ain't you cold, Miss Alice?"

"No, no—not at all. If you think it the only way, then let us begin. My father's desk, with his papers, stands in his bedroom. See to that first, Ben, and then the other things."

It did not take long for the active fellows engaged to clear the cabin of all its contents; every thing was put into the boats—and then, as Ben said, "it was high time to clear out."

The smoke was suffocating, and sparks and small branches of burning trees were beginning to fall around. Saturn and Pallas were safely stowed in the largest boat, while Alice paddled out into the stream in her own tiny canoe. The track of the fire was a mile in width; but the mill was not threatened by it, nor much troubled by the smoke, the wind carrying it in another direction. The house then occupied by the mill-hand's must be the present shelter of the captain's family.

Down the river, in the full glare of the conflagration, floated the little convoy. The smoke was not so dense about them now; it hung high above, and rolled in dark billows far beyond. The stream was crimson with the reflection, and the faces of the party looked pallid in the lurid glare—always excepting those two sable faces, turned, with awe and dread, toward that sublime picture of devastation.

Suddenly Alice, who was in advance, dropped back.

"I must return to the house," she cried, as she came alongside of the boat containing Ben and the old servants.

"No, you musn't," shouted Ben; "it's too late. It's getting mighty warm here now; and them flyin' branches 'll hit ye."

"I can't help it," replied Alice, firmly. "There's something in the garret I must have. Father would never forgive us for forgetting that trunk, Pallas."

"Law, suz! dat trunk! sure enough," groaned Pallas.

"I must get it," said the young girl.

"How can you, chile? It's locked, so yer can't get out the things, and of course *you* couldn't carry it down. Come back do, come back, dear chile, won't yer? What's forty trunks to yer own precious life, chile? And them sparks 'll set yer dress on fire, and the heat 'll smother yer all up."

"I've got a hatchet and I'll break it open," shouted Alice, now fast rowing back toward the cabin.

"That girl's right down crazy," said Ben Perkins; "here, Saturn, take these oars and make 'em fly. I'm goin' after her."

He threw off his jacket and boots, plunged into the stream, swam across, and ran along the bank, keeping pace with the sail. Both reached the house at the same instant; they were gone perhaps three minutes, and came forth again, Ben carrying the trunk upon his shoulder. One instant they paused to look upon the wall of fire behind them; but the heat was intolerable.

"These falling bits will sartainly set your clothing ablaze," said

Ben, hurrying the young girl away, who would fain have lingered yet around the home which had grown dear to her with her growth. Already the garden was withering, and the vines she had planted were drooping before their impending ruin.

"My dress is woolen," she said; "but I will go. Oh, Ben, this is terrible, is it not?"

"Yes, Miss Alice, but if ye get away safe now you may thank yer stars. I don't believe the canoe'll hold yer and the trunk both," he remarked, as he deposited his precious (to Alice) burden in the bottom of it.

"Yes it will—but you, Ben?"

"Oh, I ain't of as much consequence as a trunk," he replied bitterly. "Take care of yourself—don't mind me."

"I shan't stir from this spot until you come with me, Ben. So get into the boat, quick."

"Get in yerself, Miss Alice, and make good time. You'll be boked like a brick, if yer don't get out of this soon. I'm goin' to swim alongside. What's a mile or two swimmin' down-stream?" He threw himself into the water, and struck out as he spoke.

She kept beside him, refusing to go faster than he, that she might give him aid in case he became exhausted. The river at this spot was over a mile in width, and it would have been difficult for him, tired and heated as he already was, to make the opposite shore.

As they made their way along in this manner, the wind swept the hot breath of the fire around them in suffocating waves. The cold surface of the river kept the air comparatively pure for two or three feet above it, or they would have smothered; but as it was, Alice gasped for breath convulsively at times.

"Alice! Alice! you are sufferin'—you can't stand it," cried her companion, in a voice which betrayed the agony of his soul—it thrilled through her, it was so sharp with pain.

"Don't be uneasy, Ben, we're nearly clear of the fire, now;" but, struggle as bravely as she might, she could endure the heat no longer, and she, too, leaped into the river, and sheltering herself beneath the shadow of the skiff, swam boldly on, holding a small rope in her hand, which secured it from floating off.

As soon as the advance party had got out of the smoke and heat, they awaited the return of the two, who made their appearance in an alarming condition, Alice having become exhausted in the water, and Ben having her in one arm and swimming with the other, while he towed the skiff by a rope held between his teeth.

Alice fainted away when she found herself safe in Pallas' motherly arms; and Ben might have followed her example had not one of his comrades been ready with a flask of spirits. It was thought best to administer the same restorative to the young girl, who soon revived, murmuring, "Father will be so glad the trunk is safe, Pallas."

As the morning broke, the party reached the shelter of the mill. It was two or three days before Alice was well enough to visit the ruins of her beloved home; and then she could only row along the river, and gaze upon the blackened and smoking mass, for the earth was still too hot to be ventured upon. The cabin smoldered in a heap; the top of the great elm was blackened and the foliage gone, but it had not fallen, and the grass was crisped and withered to the edge of the river.

The tears streamed down her cheeks as she gazed; but with the hopefulness of youth, she passed on, seeking a new spot to consecrate as a second home. It was vain to think of rebuilding in the same vicinity, as all its beauty was destroyed, and it would take some years for it to renew itself. She knew that her father did not wish to live too near to his mill, as he had always kept his home aloof from it; that he would be satisfied with such a spot as she liked; and she was ambitious to begin the work, for she knew the winter would be upon them before they could complete a new house, if plans were not early made. There was a lovely spot just beyond the ravages of the fire, where the river made a crescent which held in its hollow a grove of beech and elm and a sloping lawn, standing in advance of the dark pines stretching back into the interior. As her father owned the land for some distance along the shore, she was at liberty to make her choice, and she made it here.

Ben Perkins, when necessity demanded, was the carpenter of the place. He had a full set of tools, and there were others of the men capable of helping him. There was timber, plenty of it, already sawed, for the frame of the new house, and while a portion went to work upon it, boards were sawed for the siding, and shingles turned out of the shingle machine. As the "hands" said, Alice made an excellent captain.

A little sleeping apartment had been constructed off the main cabin, at the mill, and her own bed put up in it; but she did not like the publicity of the table and place, and longed for the new home to be completed.

The emotions of David Wilde were not enviable when, upon his return, he came in sight of the blackened ruins of his home. He did not so much heed the vast destruction of valuable timber, as he did the waste of that snug little vine-covered cabin, with the garden, the flowers, and the associations clustering about all. The first question he asked when he clasped his child to his heart, and found her safe, was of old Pallas: "That trunk in the garret—was it saved?"

"Pickinny saved dat ar' trunk, masser. She thought you had suthin' important in it, and she *would* go back;" and Alice felt repaid for all the risk she had run, when she saw the look of relief upon her father's face.

Ben Perkins had planned the new house, the frame of which was ready to be raised the day after the captain's return.

Whether he had cunningly calculated that the family would some time be increased, or not, certain it is that he made liberal allowance for such a contingency. He had much natural talent as an architect, and from some printed plans which had fallen into his possession, he contrived a very pretty rustic cottage, with sharp pointed gables something in the Gothic style, and a porch in front. Alice was charmed with it.

"We'll get the house in livin' order in a month or two; but yer can't have all the fixin's over the windows and the porch afore spring; I'll have to make 'em all by hand, through the winter, when thar' ain't much else a-doin'."

Ben was ambitious to conciliate Alice, and to make her feel how useful he could be to her and her father. Love prompted his head and hands to accomplish wonders. Poor Ben! Work as he might, gain her expressions of gratitude and admiration as he might, that was the most. There was always a reserve about her which held his fiery feelings in check. His was not a nature, either to check and control its own strong passions, or to give up an object upon which they were once set.

A settled gloom came over his olive face, and his eyes burned like smoldering fires beneath their black brows. He no longer had pleasant remarks to make; no longer brought daily gifts of fish, birds, berries, squirrels, venison, or grapes to Alice; no longer tried to break down her reserve; he just worked—worked constantly, perseveringly, moodily.

Alice herself was scarcely more gay. He guessed whose image filled her mind, when she sat so long without moving, looking off at the frost-tinted forests; and the thought was bitterness.

It was necessary for Captain Wilde to go again to some settlement down the river, to get hinges, locks, window-sashes, glass, etc., for the new house, which was to be ready for those finishing touches, by the time of his return. He did not know, when he set out, whether he would go as far as Center City, or stop at some smaller point nearer home.

One day, about the time of his expected return, Ben had gone for Alice, to get her opinion about some part of house. They stood together, on the outside, consulting about it, so interested in the detail that they neither of them noticed the boat upon the river, until it was moored to the bank, and the voice of the raftsmen was heard calling to them.

Ben turned at the same moment and saw that Philip Moore was in company with Mr. Wilde. Ben's eyes fixed themselves instantly upon Alice's face, which was first pale and then red. He saw the great throb her heart gave, heard the sudden catch in her breath; and he was still looking at her when Philip sprang gayly up the path and seized her hand—the man who loved her better than life saw all the blushes of womanhood coming and going upon her face at the touch of another's hand.

A threatening blackness clouded his brow; Alice saw it and

knew that he read her secret by the light of his own passion; she almost shuddered at the dark look which he flashed upon Philip; but her father was calling for assistance to unload his craft, and Ben went forward without speaking.

"What a surly fellow that is, for one so good-looking and young," remarked Philip, carelessly, looking after him.

"He is not always so surly," Alice felt constrained to say in his defense; "he's vexed now about something."

"But that's an ill-tempered look for a youthful face, Alice. I'm afraid he'd hardly make a woman very happy—eh, Alice?"

"That's a matter which does not interest me, Mr. Moore, I assure you," answered the young girl, with an unexpected flash of pride.

CHAPTER VI.

THE COLD HOUSE-WARMING.

"It's an ill wind dat blows nobody no good; and dat yar wind dat blowed de fire right down on our cabin did us some good ater all. Masser 'n I libbed in dat log house till de day he died, hadn't been for dat fire dat frighted me so, and made me pray fasser 'n eber I prayed afore. Lor! Miss Alice, it looked like de judgment-day, when we sailed down de river in de light ob de pine-wood. 'Peared to me de worl' was on fire. I see Saturn a shakin' in his boots. He tole me, nex' day, he t'ought it was de day of judgment, sure 'nuff. I heard him askin' de good Lord please forgib him for all de 'lasses he'd taken unbeknown. My! my! I karked myself to pieces when I t'ought of it arterward, ca'se I'd never known where de 'lasses went to hadn't been for dat fire. Dis new house mighty nice. Ben didn't forget ole niggers when he built dis—de kitchen, and my settin'-room is mighty comfortable. Ben's a handy young man—smart as a basket o' chips. He's good 'nuff for anybody, but he's not good 'nuff for *my* pocket-dinny, and he ought to hab sense 'nuff to see it. Ye'd best be kered, Miss Alice; he's high tempered, and he'll make trouble. 'Souse me dat speakin'; I know ye've alters been so d'ereet and as modest as an angel. None can blame you, let what will happen. But I wish dat Mr. Moore would go away. Yes, I do, Miss Alice, for more'n a one reason. Don't tink ole Pakee not seen tra a nigger. Let he wares to leeb any peace o' mind behind him, he'd better ef'ar eat soon. 'Thar! 'thar, eh! he'd der mind be chargin'. My! how purty you las made de table look. I'm mach obliged fer yer assistance, darlin'. I'se bound to hab a splendid supper, de fast in de new house. 'Tain't much of a house-warmin', seein' we'd nobody to invite, and no fiddle, but we've done what we could to make things pleasant. Laws! ef dat nigger

ob mine wasn't such a fool he could make a fiddle, and play outin' for us, times when we was low-sperited."

Pallas' tongue did not go any faster than her hands and feet. It was the first day in the new house, and Alice and herself had planned to decorate the principal apartment, and have an extra nice supper. Ever since her father left for the mill, in the middle of the day, after the furniture was moved in, while Pallas put things "to rights," she had woven wreaths of evergreens, with scarlet dog-berries and brilliant autumn leaves interspersed, which she had fastened about the windows and doors; and now she was busy decorating the table, while the old colored woman passed in and out, adding various well-prepared dishes to the feast.

Pallas had been a famous cook in her day, and she still made the best of the materials at her command. A large cake, nicely frosted, and surrounded with a wreath, was one of the triumphs of her skill. A plentiful supply of preserved strawberries and wild plum marmalade, grape-jelly, and blackberry-jam adorned the board. A venison pie was baking in the oven, and a salmon, that would have roused the envy of Delmonico's, was boiling in the pot, while she prepared a sauce for it, for which, in times gone by, she had received many a compliment.

Philip had been taken into the secret of the feast, as Alice was obliged to depend upon him for assistance in getting evergreens. He was now out after a fresh supply, and Alice was beginning to wish he would make more haste, lest her father should return before the preparations were complete.

Again and again she went to the door to look out for him, and at last, six o'clock being come and past, she said, with a pretty little frown of vexation:

"There's father coming, and Mr. Moore not back!"

The feast waited until seven—eight—and yet Philip had not returned.

Several of the men who had been busy about the house during the day were invited in to supper; and at eight o'clock they sat down to it, in something of silence and apprehension, for every one by this time had come to the conclusion that Philip was lost in the woods. Poor Alice could not force herself to eat. She tried to smile as she waited upon her guests; but her face grew pale and her eyes large every moment. Not that there was any such great cause for fright; there were no wild animals in the vicinity, except an occasional hungry bear in the spring, who had made his way from some remote forest; but she was a woman, timid and loving, and her fears kept painting terrible pictures of death by starvation, fierce wolves, sly panthers, and all the horrors of darkness.

"Pon! pon! child, don't look so scart," said her father, though he was evidently hurrying his meal, and quite unconscious of the perfection of the salmon sauce, "ther's no cause. He's lost; but he can't get so far in the wrong direction but we'll rouse him

out with our horns and lanterns and guns. We'll load our rifles with powder and fire 'em off. He hasn't had time to get far."

"Likely he'll make his own way back time we're through supper," remarked one of the men, cheerfully, as he helped himself to a second large piece of venison-pie. "Tain't no use to be in a hurry. These city folks can't find thar way in the woods like us fellers, though. They ain't up to 't."

Alice looked over at the speaker; and, albeit she was usually so hospitable, wished he *could* make more speed with his eating. Pallas waited upon the table in profound silence. Something was upon her mind; but when Alice looked at her anxiously, she turned her eyes away, pretending to be busy with her duties.

Ben Perkins had been asked to supper, but did not make his appearance until it was nearly over. When he came in he did not look anybody straight in the face, but sitting down with a reckless, jovial air, different from his usual taciturn manner, began laughing, talking, and eating, filling his plate with everything he could reach.

"Have you seen any thing of Mr. Moore?" was the first question put to him, in the hope of hearing from the absent man.

"Moore? no—ain't he here? Thought of course he'd be here makin' himself agreeable to the women;" and he laughed.

Whether Alice's excited state exalted all her perceptions, or whether her ears were more finely strung than those around her, this laugh, short, dry, and forced, chilled her blood. He did not look toward her as he spoke, but her gaze was fixed upon him with a kind of fascination; she could not turn it away, but sat staring at him, as if in a dream. Only once did he lift his eyes while he sat at the table, and then it was toward her; they slowly lifted as if her own fixed gaze drew them up; she saw them scarcely for an instant, and—such eyes! His soul was in them, although he knew it not—a fallen soul—and the covert look of it through those lurid eyes was dreadful.

A strange tremulousness now seized upon Alice. She hurried her father and his men in their preparations, brought the lanterns, the rifles, the powder-horns; her hands shaking all the time. They laughed at her for a foolish child; and she said nothing, only to hurry them. Ben was among the most eager for the search. He headed a party which he proposed should strike directly back into the wood; but two or three thought best to go in another direction, so as to cover the whole ground. When they had all disappeared in the wood, their lights flashing here and there through openings and their shots ringing through the darkness, Alice said to Pallas:

"Let us go too. There is another lantern. You won't be afraid, will you?"

"I'll go, to please you, chile, for I see yer mighty restless. I don't like trabeling in de woods at night, but de Lord's ober all, and I'll pray fas' and loud if I get skeered."

A phantasm floated in the darkness before the eyes of Alice, all through that light spent in wandering through forest-depths, but it was shapeless, and she would not, dared not, give shape to it. All night guns were fired, and the faithful men pursued their search; and at daybreak they returned, now really alarmed, to refresh their exhausted powers with strong coffee and a hastily-prepared breakfast, before renewing their exertions.

The search became now of a different character. Convinced that the missing man could not have got beyond the hearing of the clamor they had made through the night, they now anticipated some accident, and looked closely into every shadow and under every clump of fallen trees, behind logs, and into hollows.

Drinking the coffee which Pallas forced upon her, Alice again set forth, not with the others, but alone, walking like one distracted, darting wild glances hither and thither, and calling in an impassioned voice that wailed through the wilderness, seeming to penetrate every breath of air,—“Philip! Philip!”

And now she saw where he had broken off evergreens the day before, and fluttering round and round the spot, like a bird crying after its robbed nest, she sobbed,—“Philip! Philip!”

And then she saw *him*, sitting on a log, pale and haggard-looking, his white face stained with blood and his hair mottled with it, a frightful gash across his temple and head, which he drooped upon his hand; and he tried to answer her. Before she could reach him he sunk to the ground.

“He is dead!” she cried, flying forward, sinking beside him, and lifting his head to her knee. “Father! father! come to us.”

They heard her sharp cry, and, hastening to the spot, found her, pale as the body at her feet, gazing down into the deathly face.

“Alice, don’t look so, child! He’s not dead—he’s only fainted. Here, men, lift him up speedily, he’s nigh about gone. That’s been mischief here—no mistake!”

Captain Wilde breathed hard as he glared about upon his men. The thought had occurred to him that some one had attempted to murder the young man for his valuable watch and chain and the well-filled purse he was supposed to carry. But no—the watch and money were undisturbed;—**may be he had fallen and lost his head**—if he should revive, they would know all.

They bore him to the house and laid him upon Alice’s white bed in the pretty room just arranged for her comfort; it was the quietest, pleasantest place in the house, and she would have been there. After the administration of a powerful dose of brandy the faint pulse of the wounded man fluttered up a little stronger; more was given him, the blood was wiped away, and cool, wet rags kept around his head; and by noon of the same day, he was able to give some account of himself.

He was sitting in the very spot where they had found him on the previous afternoon, with a heap of evergreens gathered about him, preoccupied in making garlands, so that he saw

nothing, heard nothing until *something*—it seemed to him a club wielded by some assailant who had crept behind him—struck him a blow which instantly deprived him of his senses. How long he lay, bleeding and stunned, he could only guess; it seemed to be deep night when he recalled what had happened and found himself lying on the ground, confused by the pain in his head and faint from loss of blood. He managed to crawl up on the log, so as to lean his head upon his arms, and had been there many hours. He heard the shouts and saw the lights which came near him two or three times, but he could not make noise enough to attract attention. When he heard Alice's voice, he had lifted himself into a sitting posture, but the effort was too great, and he sunk again, exhausted, at the moment relief reached him.

His hearers looked in each other's faces as they heard his story. *Who* could have done that murderous deed? What was the object? The pleasant young stranger had no enemies—he had not been robbed; there were no Indians known to be about, and Indians would have finished their work with the scalping-knife.

Alas! the terrible secret preyed at the heart of Alice Wilde. She knew, though no mortal lips had revealed it, who was the would-be murderer. A pair of eyes had unconsciously betrayed it. She had read "*murder*" there, and the wherefore was now evident.

Yet she had no proof of that of which she was so conscious. Should she denounce the guilty man, people would ask evidence of his crime. What would she have to offer?—that the criminal loved her, and she loved the victim. No! she would keep the gnawing truth in her own bosom, only whispering a warning to the sufferer should he ever be well enough to need it; a matter by no means settled, as David Wilde was doctor enough to know. Despite all the preventives within reach, a fever set in that night, and for two or three days, Philip was very ill, a part of the time delirious; there was much more probability of his dying than recovering. Both Mr. Wilde and Peter had their skill picked up by the necessity of being doctors to all accidents and diseases around them; and they exerted themselves to the utmost for their unfortunate young guest.

Then it was that Mr. Wilde found where the heart of his little girl had gone astray; and cursed himself for his folly in exposing her to a danger so probable. Yet, as he looked at her sweet face, worn with watching and trouble, he could not but believe that the hand of the predestinating deity on earth was near too good for her, and that Philip would recognize her beauty and worth. If she *lost* love, and be married, he would more willingly resign her to Philip Moore than to any other man. Alice lacked experience as a nurse, but she followed every motion of the good old colored woman, and stood ready to interfere where she could be of any use.

Sitting hour after hour by Philip's bedside, changing the wet cloths constantly to keep them cool, she heard words from his delirious lips which added still more to her despair—fond, passionate words, addressed not to her but to some beloved woman, some beautiful "Virginia," now far away, unconscious of her lover's danger, while to her fell the sad pleasure of attending upon him.

"Oh, that he may live, and not die by the hand of an assassin, so innocent a victim to a needless jealousy. Oh, that he may live to save this Virginia, wherever she may be, from the face of a merciless murderer. It will be joy enough for me to save his life," she cried to herself.

The crisis passed; the flash of fever was succeeded by the lax, warm and paler of extreme prostration; but the young man's condition was excellent, and he recovered rapidly. Then how it pleased Patrick to cook him tempting dishes; and how it pleased Alice to see the appetite with which he disposed of them. Women love to serve those who are dear to them; no service can be so homely or so small that their enthusiasm does not exalt it.

Yet the stronger Philip grew, the more heavily pressed a cold horror upon the soul of Alice. Ben Perkins had not been to the house since the wounded man was brought into it; and when Alice would have asked her father of his whereabouts, her lips refused to form his name. She hoped that he had fled; but then she knew that if he had disappeared, her father would have mentioned it, and that the act would have fixed suspicion upon him. She felt that he was hovering about, that he often beheld her, when she was unware of the secret gaze; she could not endure to step to the door after dark, and she closed the curtains of the windows with extreme care, especially in Philip's room.

The first light snow of November had fallen when the invalid was able to sit up all day; but, although he knew that his long absence would excite curiosity among his friends at Center City, and that business at home required his attention, he found each day of his convalescence so pleasant, that he had not strength of will sufficient to break the charm. To read to his young niece while she sewed; to watch her flitting about the room while he reclined upon a lounge; to talk with her; to enjoy her changing countenance, grew every day more sweet to him. At first he thought it was grateful she had been so kind to him. But a troubling wariness always gathered about his heart when he remembered that passionate voice, crying through the plume-woods with such a sizzling sound—"Philip Philip!"

Finding himself thus disposed to linger, he was the more chagrined to perceive that Alice was anxious to have him go; she gave him no invitation to prolong his visit, and said unequivocally, that if he did not wish to be ice-bound for the winter, he would have to depart as soon as his strength would permit. Her

father had promised him, when he came up, to take him down the river again when he was ready, as he should be obliged to go down again for winter stores; and he now awaited his visitor's movements.

No words had passed between Alice and Pallas on the subject of the attempted murder, yet the former had known that the truth was guessed by the faithful servant who also hastened the departure of their guest.

"I declare, Aunt Pallas, I believe I have worn out my welcome. I've been a troublesome fellow, I know; but it hurts my vanity to see you getting so tired of me," he said, laughingly, one day, when they were alone together, he sitting on the kitchen-steps after the lazy manner of convalescents, trying to get warmth, both from the fire within and the sun without.

"Ole folks never gets tired of young, bright folks, masser Philip. But ole folks knows sometimes what's for de best, more'n young ones."

"Then you think Miss Alice wants to get rid of me, and you second your darling's wishes—eh, Pallas?" and he looked at her, hoping she would contradict him.

"I'd do a'mos' any thing for my pickaninny—I lub her better den life; an' dar' never was and dar' such a child, so pretty and so good, as I know as has been wid her since she dew her firs' breif. If I tought she wanted you to go, I'd want you to go too, masser, not meanin' any disrespect—and she do want you to go; but she's got reason for it;" and she shook her yellow turban reflectively.

"Do you think she is getting to dislike me?"

"Dat's her own bisness, ef she is; but dat ain't de main reason. She don't like the look of that red scar down your forrid. She knows who made dat ugly scar, and what for they did it. She tinks dis a *dangerous* country for you, Masser Moore, and Pallas tink so too. Go way, masser, quick as you can, and lebbe come back any more."

"But I *shall* come back, Aunt Pallas, next spring, to bring you something nice for all you've done for me, and because—because—I shan't be able to stay away," he answered, though somewhat startled and puzzled by her revelation.

"Why not be able to stay 'way?" queried she, with a sharp glance.

"Oh, you can guess, Aunt Pallas. I shan't tell you."

"People isn't allers satisfied with guessin'—*no* to have things plain, and no mistake 'bout 'em," observed Pallas.

"Just so. I am not satisfied with guessin' who tried to kill me, and what their object was. I am going to ask Alice, this evening. She's evidently frightened about me; she won't let me stir a step alone. So you think your pickaninny is the best and prettiest child alive, do you?"

"Dat I do."

"So do I. What do you suppose she thinks of such a worthless kind of a person as myself? Do, now, tell me, won't you, auntie?"

"You cl'ar out, young masser, and don't bozzer me. I'se busy wid dis ironin'. You'd better ask *her*, if yer want to find out."

"But can't you say something to encourage me?"

"You go 'long. Better tease somebody hain't got no ironin' on hand."

"You'll repent of your unkindness soon, Aunt Pallas; for, be it known to you, to-morrow is set for my departure, and when I'm gone it will be too late to send your answer after me;" and the young man rose, with a very becoming air of injured feeling which delighted her much.

"Hi! hi! ef it could only be," she sighed, looking after him. "But we can't smooft'ings out in dis yere worl' quite so easy as I smooft' out dis table cloth. He's one ob de family, no mistake; and masser's found it out, too, 'fore dis."

That night the family sat up late, Pallas busy in the kitchen putting up her master's changes of linen and cooked provisions for the next day's journey, and the master himself busied about many small affairs demanding attention.

The two young people sat before a blazing wood-fire in the front room; the settle had been drawn up to it for Philip's convenience, and his companion, at his request, had taken a seat by his side. The curtains were closely drawn, yet Alice would frequently look around in a timid, wild way, which he could not but notice.

"You did not use to be so timid."

"I have more reason now;" and she shuddered. "Until you were here, Mr. Moore, I did not think how near we might be to murderers, even in our house."

"You should not allow it to make such an impression on your mind. It is passed; and such things scarcely happen twice in one person's experience."

"I do not fear for myself—it is for you, Mr. Moore."

"Philip, you called me, that night in the woods. Supposing I was in danger, little Alice, what would you risk for me?"

She did not answer.

"Well, what would you risk for some one you loved—say your father?"

"All things—my life."

"There are some people who would rather risk their life than their pride, their family name, or their money. Supposing a man loved a woman very much, and she professed to return his love, but was not willing to share his meager fortunes with him; could not sacrifice splendor and the passion for admiration, for his sake—what would you think of her?"

"That she did not love him."

"But you do not know, little Alice; you have never been

tempted: and you know nothing of the strength of fashion in the world, of the influence of public opinion, of the pride of appearances."

"I have guessed it," she answered, sadly.

He thought there was a shadow of reproach in those pure eyes, as if she would have added that she had been made to feel it, too.

"I loved a woman once," he continued; "I loved her so rashly that I would have let her set her perfect foot upon my neck and press my life out. She knew how I adored her, and she told me she returned my passion. But she would not resign any of her rank and influence for my sake."

"Was her name Virginia?"

"It was; how did you know?"

"You talked of her when you were ill."

"I'll warrant. But she wouldn't have sat up one night by my bed-side, for fear her eyes would be less brilliant for the next evening's ball. She drove me off to the West to make a fortune for her to spend, in case she did not get hold of somebody else's by that time. Do you think I ought to make it for her?"

There was no answer. His companion's head was drooping. He lifted one of her hands as he went on:

"I was so dazzled by her magnificence that, for a long time, I could see nothing in its true light. But my vision is clear now. Virginia shall never have my fortune to spend, nor me to twist around her jeweled finger."

The hand he held began to tremble.

"Now, little Alice, supposing I had told you of such love, and you had professed to answer it, what sacrifices would you have made? Would you have given me that little gold heart you wear about your neck—your only bit of ornament?"

"I would have made a sacrifice, but as great in its way, as the decline in pomp and position must have been to the great lady," she replied, lifting her eyes calmly to his face. "I would have given up the offered happiness if, by accepting it, I thought I should ever, by my ignorance of proprieties, give him cause to blush for me—if I thought my unbecoming looks would some time disappoint him; that he would grow weary of me as a friend and companion because I was not truly fitted for that place—if I thought I was not worthy of him I would sacrifice myself, and try to wish only for his best happiness."

His eyes shone as he ceased speaking, and the tears, which would have come into them, gazed down her cheeks.

"Where? You are more than worthy of the best man in the world, Alice!—far more than worthy of me," cried Philip, in a whisper he could not restrain. "Oh, Alice, if you only loved me in that fashion!"

"You know that I do," she replied, with that archness so native to her, smiling through her tears.

"Then say no more. There—don't speak—don't speak!" and he shut her mouth with the first kiss of a lover.

For a while their hearts beat too high with happiness to recall any of the difficulties of their new relation.

"We shall have small time to lay plans for the future, now. But I shall fly to you on the first breezes of spring, Alice. Your father shall know all on our way down the river. Oh, if there was only a mail through this forlorn region. I could write to you, at least."

"I shall have so much to do, the winter will speedily pass; I must study the books you brought me. But I shall not allow myself to hope too much," she added, with a sudden melancholy, such as sometimes is born of prophetic instinct.

"I can not hope too highly!" said Philip, with enthusiasm. "Here comes your father. Dear Alice, your cheeks are so rosy I believe he will read our secret to night."

CHAPTER VII.

SUSPENSE.

WHAT WAS the consternation of Alice when her father came back the evening of the day of his departure and told her he had concluded he could not be spared for the trip, and so, when they reached the mill, he had chosen Ben to fill his place! Every vestige of color fled from her face.

"Oh, father, how could you trust him with Philip?" burst forth involuntarily.

"Trust Ben? Why, child, thar ain't a handier sailor round the place. And if he won't, I guess Moore could take care of himself—he'll manage a craft equal to an old salt."

"Can't you go after them, father? Oh, do go, now, this night—this hour!"

"Why, child, you're crazy!" replied the captain, looking at her in surprise. "I never saw you so foolish before. Go after a couple of young claps full-grown and able to take care of themselves? They've the only sail boat there is, besides—a I don't think I shall break my old arms rowing after 'em when they've got a new day's start," and he laughed good naturedly. "No, no, I believe, I'm afraid you're overworked."

But her only consolation there was! There would be no use, then, to tell her father the contents of her suspicions. It seemed as if fate had fashioned this misadventure. Several of the men had got into a quarrel, at the mill, that morning; some of the machinery had broken, and so much business pressed upon the owner, that he had been obliged to relinquish his journey. He had selected Ben as his substitute because he was his favorite

from a gay youth full of jests and nonsense to a quiet, morose man, working more diligently than ever, but sullenly rejecting all advances of sport or confidence.

If he were secretly struggling for the mastery over evil, it was a curious faculty which threw him into a position so overwhelming in its ease and security of action.

Al, well did the unhappy Alice realize how easily now he could follow his talent—how fully in his power was that mysterious man, who had already suffered so much from his habits. Appetite and sleep forsook her; if she slept it was but to dream of a boat gliding down a river, of a strong man raising a weak one in his grasp and hurling him, wounded and helpless, into the waters, where he would sink, sink, till the waves bubbled over his floating hair, and all was gone. Many a night she started from her sleep with terrified shrieks, which alarmed her father.

"Tain't right for a young girl to be having the nightmare so, Pallas. Somethin' or another is wrong about her—hain't no nerves lately. I do hope she ain't goin' to be one of the screechin', fakin' kind of women-folks. I detest sech. Her health can't be good. Do try and find out what's the matter with her; she'll tell you quicker 'an she will me. Fix her up some kind of tea."

"De chile ain't well, masser; dat's berry plain. She's gettin' thin every day, and she don't eat nuff to keep a bird alive. But it's her mind, masser—pend on it, it's her mind. Dese young gentlemen make mischief. Wish I had masser Moore under my thumb—I'd give him a scoldin' woud last him all his life."

"Cuss Philip Moore, and all others of his class," muttered the railroad man, moodily.

Both Mr. Wilde and Pallas began to lose their high opinion of the young man, as they witnessed the silent suffering of their daughter. His going down the river without his expected company had created Philip out of the revelation he had desired to make; and Alice, with that excessive delicacy of some timid young girls, had not even confided her secret to her good old nurse.

Much better it would have been for her peace of mind, had she told all to her friends—her love and her fears. Then, if they had seen good reason for her apprehensions, they might have chased the matter down, at whatever trouble, and put her at ease. But she did not do it. She said the person to whom she must relate it had died long before she was born.

There was no longer any connection between Wilde's river and the lower country, and in the winter when the lower country was cut off. The low ice, blocking the river, was in the midst of which the two voyagers had set out, were over, and ice closed the river the very day after the return of Ben.

A sudden agony of hope and fear convulsed the heart of Alice, when her father entered the house one day, and announced Ben's arrival.

"Did he not bring me a letter? Was there no letter for you, father?"

It would be so natural that he should write, at least to her father, some message of good wishes and announcement of his safe journey—if she could see his own handwriting, she would be satisfied that all was well.

"That was none for me. If Ben got a letter for you, I suppose he'll tell you so, as he's coming in with some things."

"Have you any thing for me—any message or letter?"

It was the first time she had met Ben, face to face, since the never-to-be-forgotten night of the horse-riding; but now he looked her in the eyes, without any shrinking, and it appeared to her as if the shadow which had lain upon him was lifted. He certainly looked more cheerful than he had done since the day of Philip's unexpected arrival at the new house. Was it because he felt that an enemy was out of the way? Alice could not tell; she waited for him to speak, as the prisoner waits for the verdict of a jury.

"There ain't any letter, Miss Alice," he replied, "but there's a package—some presents for you, and some for Pallas, too, from Mr. Moore. He told me to tell you he was safe and sound, and hoped you'd accept the things he sent."

His eyes did not quail as he made this statement, though he knew that she was searching them keenly. Perhaps there was a letter in the bundle. She carried it to her own room and tore it open. No! not a single written word. The girdle for the old servant—silk aprons, gray-colored turbans, and a string of coral beads—were in one bundle. In another was a lady's dressing-case, with brushes, perfumeries, and all those pretty trifles which grace the feminine toilet, a quantity of fine writing materials, paper-folder, gold-pen, some exquisite small engravings, and, in a tiny box, a ring set with a single pure pearl. That ring! was it indeed a betrothal ring, sent to her by her lover, which she should wear to kiss and pray over? or was it intended to bind her into a bond with his murderer? Eagerly she searched every bit of wrapping paper to find some proof that it was Philip's own hand which had made up the costly and tasteful gifts. She could find nothing to satisfy her. They might have been purchased with his money, but not by him. The ring which she would have worn so joyfully had she been certain it had come from him, she put back into its case without even trying it on her finger.

"Oh God!" she murmured, throwing herself upon her knees, "must I bear this suspense all this endless winter?"

Yes, all that endless winter the weight of suspense was not to be lifted—nor for yet more miserable months.

December set in extremely cold, and the winter throughout was one of unusual severity.

As the Christmas holidays drew near, that time of feasting so

precious to the colored people raised in "ole Virginny," Saturn bestirred himself a little out of his perpetual laziness. If he would give due assistance in beating eggs and grinding spices, chopping suet and picking fowls, as well as "keep his wife in kinning-wood," Pallas promised him rich rewards in the way of dainties, and also to make him his favorite dish—woodhuck pie.

"'Char' to gracious, I don't feel a bit of heart 'bout fixin' up feasts 's yere Christmas," said she to him, one evening, in the midst of the bustle of preparation. "We've alers been Christian folks 'nuff to keep Christmas, even in de wild'ness; but what's de use of cookin' and cookin' and dar's Miss Alice don't eat as much as dat frozen chick I brought in and put in dat basket by de fire."

"But dar's mawber, Ze eat well 'nuff,— and I—I se mighty hungry dese days. Don't stop cookin', Pallas."

"You hain't got no more feelin's den a common nigger, Saturn. Nobody'd tink you was brought up in one de best families. If I could only tink of somethin' new dat would coax up pickaninny's appetite a little!"

"P'raps she'll eat some my woodhuck pie," suggested Saturn.

It was a great self-denial for him to propose to share a dish which he usually reserved especially to himself, but he, too, felt as tender as his organism would permit, toward his youthful mistress.

"Our missus eat woodhuck pie! You go 'long, Saturn; she won't eat stonch it. Dat's nigger's dish. I declar' our chile be 's black just as missus did de year afore she died. I feel worried 'bout her."

"Does you? Mebbe she's got de rheumatiz or de neurology. I got de rheumatiz bad nays a dis week pas'. Wish you'd fix up some of yer liniment, wuh."

"Well, well, eberybody has der troubles, even innocent ones like our chile. Dis is a wicked and a perverse generation, and dat is de reason our woods tak fire and our house burn up, and now our dear chile mus' go break her heart 'bout somebody as won't say wedder he loves her or not. She'll go of consumption as as missus went. Lor! wherd a thought our family wud be 'round to see her end? I remember when a Mortimer Moore came up de plantation in grand style 'erke self eberybody but I and I, Saturn, and kept us close we wouldn't bea de family, and look us to New York. Mebbe it was wicked of me to take such a thing for my missus, and I wish her to get married wery soon, and I'm wery well not to let her be so vexed and thin. But I can't do no more now, baby. I'll be obliged to see her chile den. You know what your ole woman has to be to leav' all her children den. When I tink of all de an'ny-pies and de cat'ach-pies I use to make, and see 'em, for Christmas, I don't feel no heart for to let 'em chop'n' knife and for time."

Yet the preparations progressed, and on Christmas and New

Year's day the men at the mill were supplied with a feast; but Alice could not bring herself to decorate the house with wreaths of evergreen, according to custom—it brought back hateful fears too vividly. The unceasing cry of her heart was for the river to open. She counted the hours of the days which must drag into weeks and months.

Ben now came frequently to the house. If Alice would not talk to him, he would make himself agreeable to the old servants; any thing for an excuse to linger about where he could obtain glimpses of the face growing so sad and white. Mr. Wilde had always favored him as a work-hand, and now he invited him often to his home. He hoped that even Ben's company would amuse his daughter and draw her away from her "love-sickness."

It was a few weeks after the holidays that, one evening, Mr. Wilde took Alice upon his knee, smoothing her hair as if she were a baby, and looking fondly into her face.

"I've some curious news for you, little one," he said, with a smile. "Would you believe that any one had been thinking of my little cub for a wife, and had asked me if he might talk to her about it?"

"Was it Ben, father?"

"Yes, it was Ben. No doubt you know of it before, you sly puss!"

"I refused him long ago, father. Didn't he tell you that?"

"No."

"Would you be willing I should marry a person like him?"

"No, not willing. Once I'd have set him right; if he'd had the impudence to mention it. But you're talking so, Alice, and you're so lonesome and so shut up here. I know how it is. The young must have their mates; and if you want him, I shan't make any serious objection. He's the best there is in these parts. He's better than a battering, decaying postman, Alice. I was fool enough once to imagine you'd never marry, but live your lifetime with yer old father; but I ought to have known better. 'Tain't the way of the world. 'Twasn't my way, nor your mother's way. No, Alice, if yer ever in here, and want to marry, unless I know the man's a villain, I shan't make no objection. Ben loves you, my dear, desperately. A girl should give two thoughts before she throws away such a love as his. 'Tain't every man is capable of it."

"But I'm engaged to Philip Moore, father. We love each other." Her blushing cheek was pressed against his, that he might not see it.

"Alice, my child," said the father, very gently, in a voice full of pity and tenderness, "Mr. Moore is a rascal. He may have told you that, but I won't believe it. He don't intend to marry you. He's a d—profligate aristocrat!" waxing wrothy as he went on. "There! there! don't you feel hurt; I know

all about him. Knew't he made fun of us, after all we'd done for him, in his store down to Center City, when he didn't know Ben was his son? Ben's, he advised Ben to marry you, to keep you from breakin' your heart about him; said you expected him back in the spring, but he was gone on East to marry a girl there. So you see you must think no more of that rascally fellow, Alice. If he ever does come back here I'll whip him."

"Ben told you this?" cried Alice, her eyes flashing fire and her white lips quivering. "And you believed the infamous lie, father? No! no! Ben has *murdered* him, father—he has murdered my Philip, and has invented this lie to prevent our expecting him. Oh Philip!"—her excitement overpowered her and she fainted in her father's arms.

Now that the tension of suspense had given way, and she deemed herself certain of the fate of her lover, she yielded for a time to the long smothered agony within her, going from one fainting fit to another all through that wretched night.

The next day, when composed enough to talk, she told her father all—Ben's offer of marriage, his threats, the circumstantial evidence which fixed the guilt of the assault in the woods upon him, and her belief now that Philip had been made away with. The raftsman himself was startled and to quiet and encourage his child, he promised to set off, by to-morrow, upon the ice, and slide down to Center City, that her fears might be dispelled or confirmed. But that very night the weather, which had been growing warm for a week, melted into rain, and the ice became too rotten to trust. There was nothing to do but to wait.

"Tain't by no means certain he's done such a horrible thing. And if you'll pick up courage to think so, and make yerself as easy as you can, I'll start the very first day it's possible. Likely in March the spring'll open. You may go 'long with me, too, if you wish, so as to learn the news as soon as I do. I'll say nothing of my suspicions to young Perkins but try to treat him the same as ever, till I know he deserves different."

CHAPTER VIII.

AWAY FROM HOME.

A QUAIN party were to be seen passing through some of the streets of Center City one April day of the following spring. A tall and vigorous man, with a keen, intelligent face, clad in a calico shirt, a blue-woolen hunter's frock and buckskin breeches, strode on as if anxious to reach his destination; or, rather, as if used to making good time over endless prairies and through unsurveyed forests. By his side walked a young girl

whose dress, though of the best materials, was antique as our grandmothers'; a broad brimmed hat shaded a face the loveliest ever beheld in that city; her little slippers with their silver buckles peeped out from beneath her short frock. Those who were fortunate enough to see her as she passed did not know which to admire most—the exquisite, unstudied grace of her manners, which was as peculiar as her beauty, or the sympathetic innocence of her expression. She kept pace with her companion, looking gravely forward with those great blue eyes, only occasionally giving the crowd a fawn-like, startled look, when it pressed too near. A few paces behind trudged an ancient colored couple, the man short, and white-eyed, rolling smiles as he passed, evidently supposing all the attention of the lookers on to be concentrated on his flaming vest, his flowered coat, and brand-new boots; the woman a perfect black Jew, really superb in her air and physique, wearing her neatly-fitted yellow turban as if it were a golden crown. She seldom took her eyes off the young mistress whom she followed, except occasionally to frown at some impudent fellow who stared too hard.

The group wended their way onward until they reached the names of "Raymond & Moore," in gilt letters over a new four-story brick store of this thriving new town, and here they disappeared from the view of outsiders.

"Captain Wilde! how do you do? You're down early this spring. Well, the mill's waiting for you to feed it. Come down on a raft?"

"Yes, Mr. Raymond, a thundering big one. Bring's my family this time to give 'em a chance to pick out a few things for themselves. My daughter, sir."

The merchant gave the young lady a chair. She took it mechanically, but her heart, her eyes, were asking one question of the smiling, curious man, the friend and partner of her own Philip, who for the first time began to suspect the cause which had kept the latter so long, "hunting and fishing," up at Wilde's mill. Could he look so smiling, so assured, and her Philip be dead? The cry: "Where is he?" trembled silently on her lips.

"Yes, a thundering big raft we got out this spring. Would-choppers to work all winter," continued the raftsman, walking along further from his daughter, and speaking with apparent carelessness. "By the way, where's Mr. Moore? Did he get home safe, after his spell of sickness, at our house last fall?"

"Oh, yes! he got home safe and in fine spirits. He was soon as well or better than ever. I expect he got pretty good care," and the merchant glanced over at the young girl respectfully.

Mr. Raymond was a good-hearted, retired young married man; but if he had been gross or impure, or not over-fastidious, or fond of a jest, there was something about both father and child to suppress all feelings but those of respect and wondering admiration. Alice Wilde's beauty was of a kind to defy

criticism. She might have worn sackcloth and ashes, or flannel and thick boots, or a Turkish dress, or a Puritan maiden's, or a queen's robe, it would have made but small difference; her loveliness was of that overmastering kind which draws the hearts of high and low, and makes every man feel, in her presence, forgetful of every lesser consideration, lo! here is a beautiful woman! Such charms as hers have had great power whenever they have been found—they have exalted peasant women to thrones, and led men of genius and rank, as if they were children, hither and thither. It is not strange that Alice's personal loveliness, added to her still more unusual unconsciousness of it, and infantile innocence, should at once have commanded the reverence of people of the world, in spite of the quaintness of manner and attire, in themselves pretty and piquant.

Although her father had spoken in a low voice, Alice had heard his question and the answer. The splendor of happiness broke over her countenance—blushes rose to her cheeks and smiles to her eyes; she hardly dared to glance in any direction lest she should see her lover unexpectedly, and betray her joy to strangers.

"Is he about the store this morning; or will I have to go to the mill to see him?" asked the raftsmen.

"Yer will not see him at all, this trip, I'm afraid. Mr. Moore has gone on East; he's been away several weeks now and I hardly know when to expect him. He was called there quite unexpectedly, upon business connected with his uncle, and their relatives in England. It would not surprise me at all if he should bring a bride home—that is, if he can persuade his fair cousin that the West is not such a terrible savage wilderness as she supposes."

Mr. Raymond was perfectly honest in this remark. He knew that Virginia Moore used to be the idol of his friend; and as Philip had not communicated the change in his ideas, he still supposed that Philip was only waiting to get rich enough to go home and marry her; and as Philip was now doing so well with his western enterprise, he had planned it all out in his own imagination—fortune, acceptance, and the happy *finis* of a grand wedding. He could not help looking over at the pretty forster to see how she received the news, but the portly person of the old colored woman had come between. Alas, and he could not see her face.

"Laws, Miss Alice, do you see them yere calikers—they're guppity! Look at that red one with the blue flowers—'tain't so lovely as this, though, as this with the yellow. My! my! that's a jolly yamp across the way. Yer father ought to take yer in one, this mornin'. Young girls likes them places. Laws, darlin', 'tis nothin' to compare wid New York City. Less have a drink of water, and step over de street."

All this volubility was to screen the young girl from scrutiny

A pitcher of water stood on the counter, near her, and she poured a glass for her mistress. But Alice waved the glass away, and rose without any signs of grief and pain in her face; but the expression had changed—an icy pride composed every feature; she asked the merchant to show her some of his goods in a clear, low tone, as sweet as it was passionless. Her hand did not tremble as she turned over the silks and laces.

"Good for her! She's got her father's grit," thought the raftsmen to himself, while his own throat swelled almost to choking with anger and grief, and he felt that if he only had Philip Moore within sight he would have the satisfaction of thrashing a little conscience into him.

Neither he nor Alice any longer doubted the statement of Ben Perkins. Mr. Moore *had* ridiculed them—*had* mockingly given another permission to console her whom he had forsaken—*had* said that he was going East to marry a more fit companion. As the raftsmen looked in the quiet face of his child, which repelled sympathy with a woman's pride—that pride so terrible because it covers such tortured sensibilities—his blood boiled up with ungovernable rage. He was not accustomed to controlling his sentiments upon any subject.

"Let them finnicked fixin's alone, Alice," he said, taking her hand and drawing her away. "Men that make it a business to handle that sort of thing, grow about as thin as their wares. I despise 'em. I want you to understand, Mr. Raymond, that all connection between me and this firm, business or other, is dissolved. I won't even take your cursed money. When Mr. Moore returns, tell him that the laws of hospitality prohibit my your four-story bricks ain't known in superior circles, and if he ever comes on my premises again I'll consider myself at liberty to shoot him down for a dog;" and before the surprised merchant could reply, he had strode forth.

"Come 'long, Saturn! don' stan' dar' starin'; don't yer see masser's gone? I shall be sorry I brought yer 'long if yer don't behabe wid more propitiousness. What dar' s'pose I kin' I tink your missus and masser is, ef you don't act like a first family nigger? If yer don't do er right to Miss Alice, I'll neber bring you 'way from home ag'in;" and Pallas took "her nigger" by the elbow and drew him away from the fascinating array of dry-goods and ready-made clothing.

That afternoon Captain Wile and his daughter sat in a little private sitting-room of the hotel, overlooking the street. Every thing was novel to Alice. This was absolutely her first experience away from her forest home. Yet upon all the busy, bustling scene beneath her, she gazed with vacant eyes.

About the rapid rise and growth of some of our western cities there is an air peculiar to themselves—an experience unique in the history of civilization. Situated amid scenes of unparalleled beauty, they seem to jar upon and disturb the harmony

their surroundings; brick and plaster, new shingles, and glowing white paint, unsubdued by time, rise up in the midst of fairy-land; rude wharves just over the silver waters where erst the silent canoe of the Indian only glided; wild roses flush the hill-sides, crowned with sudden dwellings: stately old forests loom up as backgrounds to the busiest of busy streets. The shrill cry of the steam-whistle startles the dreamy whippowil; the paddle-wheel of the intrusive steamboat frightens the indolent salmon from his visions of peace. As the landscape, so the people; curiously mixed of rough and refined. Center City was one of the most picturesque of these young towns; and, at present, one of the most prosperous. Broken-down speculators from the East came thither and renewed their fortunes; and enterprising young men began life with flattering prospects.

It was upon the principal street that Alice sat and looked. Streams of people hurried by, like the waves of the river, past her cabin in the wood. She saw ladies dressed in a fashion differing widely from her own; across the way, in a suit of parlor in the second story, she saw through the open blind, a young girl of about her own age sitting at a musical instrument, from which she drew, as if by magic, music that held her listeners as by golden chains. New thoughts and aims came into the mind of the red-skin's daughter. Pride was struggling to heal the wounds which love had made.

"Father, will you send me to school?" For a long time there was no answer; his head was bent upon his hand. She crept upon her knee, in her little girl way, and drew away the hand.

"I, I, I, I don't want the work of sixteen years to send you to one of them boarding schools. They'll learn you plenty of vanity and worse things, my child; they'll make you unfit to be happy and contented with yer plain old father. But that you are already. I've made a failure. You're too good for them that's about you, and I'm good enough for them you wish to be like. Go to school if you want to, child; go, and learn to put on airs and despise those who would give their heart's blood for you. I shall make **no objection.**"

"Do you think I could learn to be so very bad, father? If you can not trust me, I will not go. So let us say no more about it," and she kissed him.

"There, there, child, I didn't mean to deny ye. But I feel bitter today—hard and bitter—as I used to in days gone by, when your mother died, turned off by them that were ashamed of yer father. If ye'll only keep like yer mother, ye may do what ye wish. She went to school, and she knew more than a dozen boarding schools; but it didn't spoil her. Maybe I've done wrong turning you up the way I have—to visit my experience and my troubles on your young head. We must all live and learn for ourselves. Go to school, if you want to. I'll try and **get along without my little cubbie for a year or two.**"

"It's hard, father—hard for me—but I wish it." Pride was steeling the heart of the forest maiden. "But are you able, father? Can you pay the expense?"

This thought never came to her till after she had his promise.

"Yes, I'm able—and if it's done, it shall be done in the best style. I haven't cut down all the pine timber I've started for the last fifteen year, without laying up something for my old. I want you to dress as well as any you see, and stay wherever you like, and play lady to your heart's content. You'd better find a dressmaker, the first thing, and not be stared at every time you step out of the door. Get yourself silks and satins, girl, and hold your head up like the queen of the prairie."

When Captain Wilde returned up the river, he and his whole suite made a melancholy journey; for the light of their eyes, the joy of their hearts, was left behind them.

A young ladies' seminary, "a flourishing young institution beautifully located in a healthy region, with spacious grounds, enjoying the salubrious river-breezes," etc., etc., held prisoner the wild bird of the forest.

"Where's your daughter?" asked Ben Perkins of his employer, when he saw the returning party had without Alice. His face was blanched to a dead-white, for he expected certainly to hear that she had been claimed as bride by Philip Moore.

"Yer story was true, Ben, though I did ye the wrong to doubt it. Alice will never be the wife of that counter-jumper. But she'll never be yours, neither; so you might as well give up, first as last. Go off somewhere, Ben, and find somebody else; that's my advice."

"Look-a-here, Captain Wille, I know you mean the best, and that my chance is small; but I tell you, sir, just as long as Alice is free to choose, and I've got breath and sense to try for her, I shan't give her up. Never, sir! I'll work my fingers off to serve you and her—I'll wait years—I'll do any thing you ask, only so you won't lay any thing in my way."

The rufian looked pityingly in the haggard face of the sneaker—the face which a year ago was so bright and boyish. He saw working in those dark lacunæ, in the smart blood coursing under the olive skin, in the gleam of the black eyes, passions difficult to check, which might urge him in future years to yet other crimes than the one into which he had already been betrayed.

"You're high-tempered, Ben, my boy, and a little too rough to suit a girl like mine. She knows what your temper has already led you to do," and he looked straight at the youth as he spoke, whose eyes wavered and sunk to the ground—it was the first intimation he had had that his goal was suspected. "Why not go off, and find some one more like yourself—some pretty, red-cheeked lass who'll think you the best and handsomest

fellow on earth, and be only too happy to marry you? That's plenty such chances—and you'd be a deal happier."

"Don't, don't talk so!" burst forth Ben, impetuously. "I can't do it, and that's the end on't. I've tried to get away, but I'm bound here. It's like as if my feet were tied to this ground. I've done bad things in my determination to keep others away. I know it, and I own up to it. I've been desperate—crazy! But I ain't a half-fellow. If Miss Alice would smile upon me, 'pears to me I could do the best—'pears to me I'd try to get to be as good as she is. Even if she never would marry me, if she'd let me stay 'round and work for you, and she didn't take up with nobody else, I'd be content. But if I have to give her up entirely, I expect I'll make a pretty man, cap'n. I've all kinds of wicked thoughts about it, and I can't help it. I ain't made of milk and water. I'd rather fight a bear than court a girl. I shan't never ask another woman to have me—no, sir! I'd 'ave made you a good son, if all heads had been willin'. But if Miss Alice means to make herself a fine lady, to catch some other sweet lady-killer like the one that's given her the mitten, it's her choice. She'll up and marry somebody that won't speak to her old father, I s'pose."

"That's no telling," answered the ra'sman, sally; for in truth, the changed manner of his dating before he left her, lay like a weight upon his memory and heart. He felt a chord of sympathy linking him to the young man, as if theirs was a common cause. Alice seemed to have recoiled from them as in a dream, growing more cold and reserved, as she glided into the distance. Her trouble, instead of flinging her more closely into her father's arms, had torn her from him, and taught her self-control. She had deserted her home, had left him to care for himself, while she fitted herself for some sphere into which he could not come. That "sharper than a serpent's tooth—a thankless child," he was tempted to call her. Yet his heart refused such an accusation. She had been suddenly shaken in her present faith in others, had been wounded in pride and deserted in love—and her present mood was the high reaction of the blow. Presently she would be herself again, would come back to her home and her humble friends with the same modest, affectionate, gentle character as of old.

But he would treat her differently; he would gratify her love of the beautiful. She should have books, music, fine furniture, fine clothes. He did not ask himself what all these would be worth without that paramount necessity of the youthful mind—companionship. Alas! the ra'sman, binding up his idol in selfishness, had only as he might thought to fix her heart only upon himself. And the little bird had learned to fly, and had gone out of the parent nest, flitting out into the untied world, impelled by the consciousness of wings.

CHAPTER IX.

A ROLAND FOR AN OLIVER.

"You are rich, Philip!"

"Yes, Virginia, or soon shall be."

"How like a fairy story it all sounds."

"Or a modern novel."

"We can be happy now, Philip!"

The two young people were leaning over the balustrade of a balcony of the summer residence of Mortimer Moore. The rich moonlight was still permeated with the rosy tinges of sunset; the early dew called out the fragrance of a near meadow in which the grass had been cut that day, and its odors were mingled with the perfumes of roses and lilies in the garden beneath the balcony. It was an hour to intoxicate the souls of the young and loving. If Virginia had been dressing herself for a ball she would not have used more care than she had shown in the simple afternoon toilet she now wore—simple, and yet the result of consummate tact. A single string of pearls lay up the heavy braids of black hair, an Indian muslin robe, in whose folds lurked precious perfumes, fluted about her form—the white full sleeves falling away from the ivory arms, gave softness to their rounded outlines. A bunch of violets nestled in the sand transparent fabric where it was gathered over her bosom. The creaminess of her low, smooth forehead just deepened in her cheek to that faint blush which you see in the heart of a tea rose; her straight brows, long lashes, and the deep, dark eyes smiling under them, all showed to wonderful advantage in the delicious light.

As she uttered the last words, she laid her hand lightly upon Philip's arm, and looked up into his face. He was fully aware, at that moment, of her attraction; a smile the meaning of which she could not fully fathom, answered her own, as he said:

"I *hope* we can be happy, my fair cousin. I expect to be very much blessed as soon as a slight suspense which I can live is done away with."

"Why should you feel suspense, Philip? Every thing smiles upon you."

"I see *you* are smiling upon me, my beautiful cousin; and that is a great deal, it not every thing. You always promised to smile upon me, you know, if I ever got gold enough to make it prudent."

"It seems to me as if there was sarcasm in your voice, Philip. You know that I have always thought more of you than any one else; and if I would not marry you when poor, it was because I dared not. Now we are equal—in fortune, youth, health.

My father is so much better. He was out walking this afternoon; the country air has benefited him. The doctor thinks it may be years before he has another attack. You've been very kind to him, Philip. When our fortunes are joined, we can live almost as we please—as well as I care to live. Won't it be charming?"

The tapering white hand slid down upon his own.

"Very. You remember that trite passage in the *Lady of Lyons*, which the mob, the vulgar crowd, are still disposed to *recite*. Supposing we change the scene from the Lake of Como to the banks of the Hudson—listen, Virginia! how prettily sentiment sounds in this moonshine:

"A palace lifting to eternal summer

Its marble walls, from out a glossy bower

Of coolest foliage, musical with birds,

Whose songs should syllable thy name! At noon

We'd sit beneath the arching vines, and wonder

Why earth should be unhappy, while the heavens

Still left us youth and love. We'd have no friends

That were not lovers; no ambition, save

To excel them all in love—that we might smile

To think how poorly we phrase of words

True as the poetry of hearts like ours.

And when night came, amidst the breathless heavens,

We'd guess what star should be our home when love

Is most immortal; while the perfunctory light

Stole through the mist of alabaster lamps,

And every air was heavy with the sighs

Of orange-groves and music of sweet lutes,

And murmurs of low fountains that gush forth

In the midst of roses! Dost thou like the picture?"

"Go on, Virginia, can't you act your part?"

"Let me see, can I recall it?—

"Oh, as the bee upon the flower, I hang

Upon the honey of thy eloquent tongue;

Am I not best? And if I love too wildly—

Who would not love thee like Virginia?"

"A very passable actress you are, cousin. I'd have thought you really meant that, once, you put such fervor in your voice. But—

"Oh false one!

It is the prince thou lovest, not the man."

"Nay, Philip, like Pauline, I must plead that you wrong me. Already, before my father summoned you, before we heard the whisper of your coming fortune, I had resolved to search you out and take back my cruel resolution—more cruel to myself than to you. I found that I had overrated my powers of endurance—that I did not know my own heart. Dear Philip, will you not forgive me? Remember how I was brought up."

Two tears glimmered in the moonlight and I pressed upon his hand. They ought to have melted a stonier susceptibility than his.

"Willingly, Virginia. I forgive you from my heart—and more,

I thank you for that very refusal which you now regret. If that refusal had not driven me into the wilds of the West, I should never have met my perfect ideal of womanhood. But I have found her there. A woman, a child rather, as beautiful as yourself—as much *more* beautiful as love is lovelier than truth; an Eve in innocence, with a soul as crystal as a silver lake, as pure as the breezes and the wild flowers; as loving as love itself; and so ignorant that she does not know the worth of money, and did not inquire about the settlements when I asked her to marry me. Think of that, Virginia!”

“Are you in earnest, Philip?”

“I am. I am sorry for your disappointment, my sweet cousin, and hope you have not thrown away any eligible chances while waiting for me. I’m going to-morrow, as fast as steam can carry me, to put an end to that suspense of which I spoke. My little bird is deep in the western forests, looking out for me with those blue eyes of hers, so wistfully, for I promised to be back long ago. Your father’s affairs are in a tangled condition, I warn you, Virginia; and you’d better make a good match while you’ve still the reputation of being an heiress. I’ve been trying to get my uncle’s matters into shape for him; but I’m quite discouraged with the result.”

“Perhaps that’s the reason you have forgotten me so easily, Philip.”

“I should expect you, my disinterested and very charming cousin, to entertain such a suspicion; but my pretty foster-sister lives in a log cabin, and has neither jewels nor silk dresses. So you see, I am not mercenary. *Her* loveliness needs not the foreign aid of ornament.’ She looks better with a wild rose in her hair than any other lady I ever saw with a wreath of diamonds.”

“You are in a very generous mood, this evening, Philip Moore. You might at least spare comparisons to the woman you have refused.”

“I couldn’t inflict any wounds upon your heart, cousin, for that’s nothing but concentrated carbon—it’s yet beyond the fusible state—and it’s nothing now but a great diamond—very valuable, no doubt, but altogether too icy cold in its sparkle for me.”

“Go on, sir. My punishment is just, I know. I remember when *you* were the pleader—yet I was certainly more merciful than you. I tempered my refusal with tears of regret, while you spice yours with pungent little peppery sentences.”

“Don’t pull those violets to pieces so, Virginia. I love those flowers; and that’s the reason you were the first thought. If you’d have followed your own taste, you’d have worn *purple*. But, seriously, I must go to-morrow. I have remained away from my business much longer than I should; but I could not desert my uncle in his sickness and distress. His death I saw in the future. He was kind to me in my boyhood, he made me much of what I am, and if he did not think me fitted to carry the honors of

his family to the next generation, I can still be grateful for what he did do."

"You do not give me credit for the change which has come over me—if you did, you could not leave me so coolly. I'm not so bound up in appearances as I was once. Ah, Philip! this old country-house will be intolerably lonely when you are gone."

He looked down into the beautiful face trembling with emotion; he had never seen her when she looked so fair as then, because he had never seen her when her feelings were really so deeply touched. The memory of the deep passion he had once felt for her swept back over him, tumultuous as the waves of a sea. Her cheek, wet with tears, and flushed with feeling, pressed against his arm. It was a dangerous hour for the peace of that other young maiden in the far West. Old dreams, old habits, old hopes, old associates, the glittering of the waves of the Hudson, familiar to him from infancy, the scent of the sea-breeze and the odors of the lilies in the homestead garden, the beautiful face upon his arm which he had watched since it was a babe's rosy face in its cradle—all these things had power, and were weaving about him a rapid spell.

"What does that childish, ignorant young thing know of love, Philip? If some rustic fellow with rosy cheeks, who could not write his own name, had been the first to ask her, she would have said 'Yes' just as prettily as she did to you. But I have been tried—I know others, myself and you. My judgment and my pride approve my affection. Then the West is no place for a man like you. You used to be ambitious—to plan out high things for your future. I adore ambition in a man. I would not have him sit at my feet day and night, and make no effort to conquer renown. I would have him great, that I might love his greatness. I would aspire with and for him. You must be a shining light here, Philip, where it is a glory to shine. Why will you throw yourself away upon a rude and uncultured community? Stay here a week or two longer, and think better of the mode of life you have chosen."

The moon hung in the heavens, high and pure, drawing the silences of the ocean, whose sighs they could almost hear; and like the moon, fair and serene, the memory of Alice Wilde hung in the heaven of Philip's heart, calming the earthly tide of passion which beat and murmured in his breast. He remembered that glowing assurance of hers that she would sacrifice *herself* for him, and he could not think her love was a chance thing, which would have been given to a commoner man just as readily.

"I have tarried too long already, Virginia; I must go to-morrow."

He did not go on the morrow; for while they stood there on the lawn in the summer moonshine, a servant came hastily, with word that the master of the house was again stricken down. In his library, as he sat reading the evening paper.

He was carried to his room, and laid upon his bed in an unconscious state. Everybody seemed to feel, from the moment of his attack, that this time there was no hope of his recovery. The family physician had only left him and returned to the city a day or two previously. The evening boat would be at the landing just below in fifteen minutes; Philip ordered a trusty servant to proceed on board of her to New York, and bring back the medical attendant by the return boat in the morning. Meanwhile he did what little he could for the relief of the agonized man, while Virginia, pale as her dress, the flowers in her bosom withering beneath the tears which fell upon them, sat by the bedside, holding the paralyzed hand which made no response to her clasp. Hours passed in this manner; toward morning, while both sat watching for some sign of returning sensibility to the deathly features, the sufferer's eyes unclosed and he looked about him with a wandering air:

"Where is Alice? Alice! Alice! why don't you come? I've forgiven you, quite, and I want you to come home."

"He is thinking of my sister," whispered Virginia, looking with awe into the eyes which did not recognize her, and drawing her cousin nearer to her side.

"Don't tell me she is dead—Alice, the pride of my house—not dead!"

"Oh, it is terrible to see him in such a state. Philip, can't you do something to relieve him?"

"Virginia, poor child! I'm afraid he is beyond mortal aid. Be brave, my dear girl, I will help you to bear it."

Philip could not refuse, in that sad hour, his sympathy and tenderness to the frightened, sorrowful woman who had only him to cling to. Presently the wild look faded out of the sick man's eyes.

"Virginia, is that you? My poor child, I am dying. Nothing can save me now. I leave you alone, no father, no mother, sister or brother, or husband to care for you when I am gone. Philip, are you here? Will you be all these to Virginia? Do not hesitate, do not let pride control you in this hour. I know that I rejected you once, when you asked to be my son; but I see my mistake now. You have been very kind and respectful to me since I sent for you. You are a man of probity and honor. I should die content, if I knew Virginia was your wife, if you had not a thousand dollars to call your own. Poor girl! she will have very little after all my vain seeking of wealth for her. Gold is nothing—*happiness* is all. Virginia, take warning by me. I am a witness of the hollowness of pride. I have been a sad and discontented man for years. The memory of my cruelty to my Alice has stood like a specter between me and joy. Choose love—marry for love. Philip is more than worthy of you; try to make him happy. My boy, you don't speak. Take her hand, here, and promise me that you will take good care of my last and only child."

He uttered all this in a low voice, rapidly, as if afraid his strength would not last him to say what he wished. Virginia turned to her cousin and seized his hand.

"Philip! Philip! can you refuse—can you desert me, too? Oh, father! I shall be alone in this world."

"Why do you not promise me, and let me die in peace?" exclaimed the old man, with some of that stern command in his voice which had become a part of him; "do you not love my daughter?"

"Not as I did once. At least—but that's no matter. Do not distress yourself, father, about Virginia. I will be to her a true and faithful brother. I promise to care for her and share with her as if she were my sister."

"But I cannot see her your wife, my boy, I should feel repaid for all I have done for you, since you were thrown upon my hands as an orphan and friendless, as my child will soon be. Send her to the priest, child her, and I make it sure."

Philip was silent; his cousin, too, was silent and trembling. "Do not you see I'm going?—do you want to let me die un-attended?"—the quivering voice was weak and sinking.

"I promise to be a brother to Virginia—to care for her as if she were my own niece. Is not that enough?"

"Still no!" cried the dying man, who, having been un-der the influence of exacting all his life, could not change his nature at the hour of death.

Philip was uncertain what to do, tempted by the force of his father's words. Philip wavered; but the moment when his promise would have given his uncle any satisfaction had passed—his father's change was upon his face, the sweat upon his brow, the rattle in his throat.

"Oh, my father!" sobbed Virginia, sinking upon her knees and throwing her arms over the heart which had ceased to beat.

The gray morning broke over her as she wept wildly beside the bed. Philip was obliged to draw her away from the room by force, while others came to attend upon the dead. To see her so given up to grief, so desolate, with no one but himself to whom she could turn, touched him with pity and tenderness.

"Weep, if you will, poor girl; it will be better than creaking back all these tears. Weep in my arms, for I am your brother now," he said, very gently, as he seated her upon a sofa and drew her head to his shoulder, soothing her and quieting her excess of emotion, until, from fatigue and exhaustion, she dropped asleep on his bosom.

"How lovely she is, with her arrogance and vanity all melted away by some real sorrow," he thought, as he laid her carefully upon the pillow, and went out to give directions to the distracted household.

During the next week Philip made himself of use to all, over-seeing, quietly directing and controlling every thing, and when

the funeral was over, the outer excitement subsided, and nothing left but the emptiness and shadow of the house from which the dead had recently been borne, then he had to consult with the orphan girl what should be done for the future.

"Will you stay where you are for the summer, while I go back and attend to my affairs at the West? If you will, I can come back again in the autumn, and we can then decide upon some settled plan for the future."

"I can stay here, if you think best. But it seems to me as if I shall go wild with fear and loneliness in this great house with no one but the servants, after you are gone. I don't know what to do, Philip."

"Is there no friend of your own sex who would be comfort and company, whom you could invite to stay with you till I come back? You will not wish to go into town this winter. Besides, my dear girl, I must tell you that the town-house will not be long in your hands. When the estate is settled up, the property here, and a small annuity possibly, will be all that I can save for you. Will it not be best for you to break up, dismiss the expensive array of servants, rent your house, and live in some agreeable family?"

"Oh, Philip, I don't know. I can't think and I can't do it. I know nothing of business. I wish you to do every thing for me;" her helplessness appealed to him strongly.

She could only think of one way with which she could be happy and content; but he did not propose that way.

"I can only suggest this, then, for the present: stay where you are now until I go home and arrange matters there. I must go home for a few weeks. In the mean time the affairs of the estate will be closing up. When I return, I will see to them; and when all is settled, if you wish to go to the West with me, you shall go. If I have a home by that time, you shall share it."

"How share it, Philip?"

He did not reply. He was resolved to see Alice Wilde again, to satisfy himself her character was all he had dreamed it—her love what he hoped; if so, nothing should tempt him from the fulfillment of the sweet promise he had made himself and her—neither gratitude to the dead nor sympathy with the living.

CHAPTER X.

RECONCILIATION.

ALICE WILDE had been taught by her father to "read, write, and cipher," and was not ignorant of the rudiments of some of the sciences; for, curiously enough, considering surrounding circumstances, there was quite a little library of books at the house.

home, and some old-fashioned school-books among the number. If, when she first went into the seminary at Center City, some of the young ladies were disposed to ridicule her extreme ignorance upon some matters, they would be surprised by superior knowledge upon others; and finally were content to let her assert her own individuality, and be what she was—a puzzle; a charming puzzle, too, for her kindness and sweetness made her beauty so irresistible that they could look upon it without envy. Another thing which helped her along both with teachers and pupils was the excellence of her wardrobe and her lavish supply of pocket-money, for it is tolerably well known that the glitter of gold conceals a great many blemishes. Before the first term was over she was the praise, the wonder, and the pet of the school; flying rumors of her great beauty and her romantic "belongings" having even winged their way over the pickets which surrounded the seminary grounds, and wandered into the city.

The evening that Philip Moore reached home, after his eastern journey, chanced to be the same as that upon which the seminary began its annual exhibition, previous to closing for the long August holiday. He would not have thought of attending anything so tiresome; but, taking tea with his partner, whose pretty wife was going and urged him to accompany them, he was persuaded against his inclination.

"As you are already spoken of for mayor, Raymond, and as I am one of the city fathers, I suppose we must show a becoming interest in all the various 'institutions' which do honor to our rising town," laughed Philip, as he consented to attend with his friends.

"It will be very encouraging, especially to the young ladies, to see your wise and venerable countenance beaming upon them," remarked Raymond.

"But really, Mr. Moore, there's somebody there worth seeing. I'm told—somebody quite above the average of blue ribbon and white muslin beauty. I've heard all kinds of romantic stories about her, but I haven't seen her yet," chattered the young wife. "She's the daughter of a fisherman, I believe, who's grown enormously rich selling salmon and white-fish, and who's very proud of her. Or else she's an Indian princess whose father dug up a stock of buried gold—or something out of the common way. I don't know just what."

Philip's heart gave a great bound. "Could it be?" he asked himself. "No—hardly—and yet"—he was now as anxious to be "seen off" by the stupid exhibition as he had hitherto been to escape it.

They took seats early in the hall, and had leisure to look about them. Philip bowed to acquaintances here and there. After a time he began to feel unpleasantly conscious of some spell fastening upon him—some other influence than his own will magnetizing his thoughts and movements, until he was

compelled to look toward a remote part of the room, where, in the shadow of a pillar, he saw two burning eyes fixed upon him. The face was so much in the shade that he could not distinguish it for some time; but the eyes, glowing and steady as those of a rattlesnake, seemed to pierce him through and transfuse him. He looked away, and tried to appear indifferent, yet his own eyes would keep wandering back to those singular and formidable ones. At last he made out the face: it was that of the young man who had brought him down from Wilde's mill the last autumn. What was Ben Perkins doing in such a place as this? He began to feel certain who the mysterious pupil was.

"She has thought to please and surprise me," he mused, "yet I believe I would rather she would have kept herself just as unsophisticated as she was, until she learned the world under my tutelage."

Young ladies came on to the stage, there was music and reeling—but Philip was deaf, for *she* was not amid the graceful throng.

At last she came. His own timid wild-flower, his fawn of the forest, stole out into the presence of all those eyes. A murmur of admiration could be heard throughout the hall. She blushed yet she was self-possessed. Philip gazed at her in astonishment. Her dress of the richest blue silk, the flowers on her breast and in her hair, the bow, the step, the little personal adornments, were all *a la mode*. His woodland sylph had been transformed into a modern young lady. He was almost displeased—and yet she was so supremely fair, such a queen—and the others, that she looked more lovely than ever. He wondered if everybody had been teaching her how beautiful she was. There was nothing of coquetry or vanity in her looks—but a pale, cold and stony, which was entirely new to her.

He turned to Ben Perkins, who had leaned forward into the light so that his face was plainly visible; and the suspicions he had often entertained that the youth loved Alice were confirmed by his expression at that moment.

"Poor boy! how can he help it?" thought the proud and happy gentleman, regarding the unfortunate with a generous compassion. He now saw that Mr. Wilde was sitting by Ben's side, his heart and eyes also fixed upon the stage.

"I've seen that face before," whispered Mr. Raynham. "Where was it? Ah, I remember it well, now. I can tell you what she is, Philip. She's the daughter of Captain Wilde, our greatest customer of ours, who hails from the upper country. She's a glorious, remarkable girl! By the way, Philip, tell her for me. Because I've a message for you. Captain Wilde told me to inform you that if you ever set foot on his premises again he should consider himself at liberty to shoot you."

"Flirt with her! Let me tell you, Raynham, I'm engaged to her, and intend to marry her just as soon as I can persuade her

to set a day. I love her as deeply as I honor her. There's something gone wrong, somewhere, or her father would not have left such a word—he's a stern, high-tempered man, but he does not threaten lightly. They could not have received my letters."

"I presume I made part of the mischief myself," confessed Raymond, "for almost the first thing I told them when they entered my store this spring was, that you had gone off to marry your elegant cousin. You needn't look so provoked, Phil; I told them in good faith. You used to love Virginia in the day when you confided in me; and if you'd have kept up your confidence, as you should, I would have been posted, and could have given your friends all the information they were in search of. Don't you see 'twas your own fault?"

"I suppose it was," replied Philip, with a smile, but still feeling uneasy, and oh, how intensely anxious to get where he could whisper explanations to the heart which, he now saw, had suffered more in his absence than he could have dreamed. Henceforth his eyes were fixed only upon Alice. Soon she perceived him; as their eyes met, she grew pale for a moment, and then went on with her part more calmly than ever. To him, it seemed as if they both were acting a part; as if they had no business, in that hour, to be anywhere but by each other's side; he did not even know what share she had in the performance, except that once she sang, and her voice, full, sweet, melancholy, the expression of the love-song she was singing, seemed to be asking of him why he had been so cruel to her.

The two hours of the exercises dragged by. The people arose to go; Philip crowded forward toward the stage, but Alice had disappeared. He lingered, and presently, when she thought the hall was vacated, she came back to see if her father had waited to speak with her. He was there; other parties were scattered about, relatives of the pupils, who wished to speak with them or congratulate them. She did not see him, but hurried down the aisle to where her father and Ben were standing. She looked pale and fatigued—all the pride had gone out of her air as the color had gone out of her cheek.

"Alice! dear Alice!" exclaimed Philip, pressing to her side, just as she reached her father.

Indignantly she turned toward him with haughty calmness.

"Mr. Merton. Allow me to congratulate you. Was that your bride standing by your side during the exercises?"

"That was Mrs. Raymond, my father's wife. But what business have you to ask, Alice? I supposed you had consented to take that name, if ever any one. Mr. Wilde, I received your message through Mr. Raymond, but I knew you were once too good to be a friend of mine, and are always too honorable a man, to refuse me a chance of explanation."

"Say your say," was the raftsmen's curt reply.

"You need not speak one word, Philip. It is I who ought to

beg *your* forgiveness, that I have wronged you by doubting you. Love—oh, love should never doubt—never be deceived!” exclaimed Alice.

“It would have taken much to have disturbed my faith in you, Alice.”

“Because I had every motive for loving you; while you—you had pride, prejudice, rank, fashion, every thing to struggle against in choosing me.”

“Indeed!” cried Philip. “Yes, every thing, to be sure,” and he cast such an expressive glance over the youthful loveliness that she blushed with the delicious consciousness of her own charms. “Oh, ugly, awkward, and ignorant, how ashamed I shall be of my wife!”

“But, Philip!” her tearful eyes, with the smiles flashing through them, made the rest of her excuses for her.

Holding her hand, which was all the caress the presence of strangers would permit, Philip turned to the rational man.

“I asked you for your daughter’s hand, in the letter which I sent you on the return of the young man who bore it to me from your home, last autumn, since your sudden change of plans prevented my asking you in person. I have not yet had your answer.”

When he said “letter,” Alice’s eyes turned to Ben, who had been standing within hearing all this time; he met her questioning look now with one of stubborn despair.

“You gave us no letters, Ben.”

Philip also turned, and the angry blood rushed into his face.

“Did you not deliver the letters I sent by you, young man?”

“Ha! ha! ha! No, by thunder, I didn’t! Did you think a man was such a fool as to help put the halter around his own neck? I didn’t give the letters, but I told all the lies I could to hurt you, Philip Moore. You ought to be a devil man now, by good rights. The game’s not up yet. Let me tell you that!” And scowling at the party, he strode away into the night.

“He ought to be arrested—he is a dangerous fellow,” said Mr. Wilde, looking after him uneasily.

“I am sorry for him,” said Philip, “but that can do him no good.”

“Look out for him, Philip; you cannot be too wary—he will kill you if he gets a chance. Oh, how much trouble that desperate boy has given me. I can not be happy while I know he is about.”

“Fare thee, child, don’t you go to gather news of him. We’ll take care of Ben. Don’t you trouble your head about him.”

“If you could guess what I have suffered this winter past,” whispered Alice, pressing closer to her lover.

“My poor little forest-town,” he murmured. “But we must stop talking here; cave-droppers are gathering about. I

suppose this ogre of a seminary will shut you up to-night ; but where shall I see you to-morrow, and how early ? I have yet to explain my absence to you and your father—and I'm eager, oh, so eager, to talk of the future as well as the past."

"Meet us at the Hotel Washington, at my room," replied Mr. Wilde, speaking for her. "We will be there at nine o'clock in the morning. And now good night, pass. You did bravely tonight. I'm going to see Philip safe home, so you need not dream of accidents."

Alice kissed her father good-night. That she wanted to kiss his cheek as well, and that he wanted to have her, was evident from the lingering looks of both ; but people were looking askance at them, and their reluctant hands were obliged to part.

That night the store of Raymond & Moore was discovered to be on fire ; the flames were making rapid headway when the alarm spread, and persons were thundering at the door and windows in two minutes.

"Does any one sleep in the store ?" shouted one.

"Yes ! yes ! young Moore himself—he has a room at the back."

"Why don't he come out then ? He'll be burned alive. Burst in the doors. Let us see what has happened him."

"The fire seems to come from that part of the building. He will surely perish."

The crowd shouted, screamed, battered the doors in with excitement—some ran round to the back, and a ladder was placed at the window of his room, which was in the second story. Light came from that room. David Wilde, whose hotel was but far distant, mingling with others who rushed out at the alarm, as is the custom in provincial towns, was the first to place his foot on the ladder ; his strength was great, and he broke in the door with a stroke of his fist, leaped into the building, appearing in a moment with the young man, whom he handed down to the ground, climbing up the ladder after him.

"He's safe, but as sufficed with the smoke—that's all. Dash water on him, and he'll be all right presently," he cried to those who pressed about. "It's that Ben, I know—cuss me, if I don't believe the boy's crazy," he muttered to himself.

Philip soon shook off the stupor which had so nearly resulted in the most terrible of deaths, and was able to help others in removing the property. The fire was got under without much loss to the building, though its contents suffered from severe damage. The young man was not discouraged by this, as all his hopes were centred in insurance ; they had the promise of a large sum "coming to rights" again, but that was the worst.

It was apparent, upon examination, that the fire was the work of an incendiary ; Philip felt, in his heart, what the guilty intention was, and I shall linger at his narrow escape. It was decided by him and Mr. Wilde to put the authorities upon the proper track ; but the perpetrator had fled, and no clue could be

got to him in the city. Mr. Wilde at once suspected he had gone up the river, and feeling that they should have no peace until he was apprehended, and not knowing what his chief might do at the mill, he took the sheriff with him and started for home leaving Alice, for the present, at the school with permission of the principal to see her friends when she chose. As it was now vacation. Before he left there was a long conversation between the three—Philip, Alice, and her father. Philip explained his absence. As he went on to speak of Mortimer Moore and his daughter, of his death, the troubled state of the family affairs, etc., the raftsmen betrayed a keener interest than his connection with those affairs would seem to warrant.

"Poor Virginia! she is all alone, and she is your cousin, Philip," said Alice.

"She tried hard to get back her old power over me, Alice. You must beware how you compassionate her too much. But when we are married, and have a home of our own, we will share it with her, if you consent. I've no doubt she can find somebody worthy of her, even in this savage West, as she thinks it. And, by the way, I think we ought to get a house of our own as soon as possible, in order to have a shelter to offer my cousin—don't you, Alice?"

"She's tongue-tied. Girls always lose their tongues when they need 'em the most."

"Now, father, I should think you might answer for me," said Alice, trying to raise her eyes, but blazes and confusion would get the better of her, and she took refuge in her father's lap.

"Well, pass, I s'pose you want to go to school five or six years yet—tell him you've made your calculations to keep in school till you're twenty-two."

"School! I'll be your teacher," said Philip.

"Choose for yourself, pass. I s'pose the sooner you shake off yer old father, the better you'll like it."

"I shan't shake you off, father. Neither shall I leave you alone up there in the wood. That matter must be settled at the start. I shall never marry, father, to desert you, or be an ungrateful child."

"Suppose we arrange it in this way then. We will live with your father in the summer, and he shall live with us in the winter. I don't want a prettier place than William's hall to spend my summers in."

"Oh, that will be delightful," exclaimed the young girl; and then she blushed more deeply than ever at having expressed her pleasure.

"Then don't keep me in suspense any longer, but tell me if you will get ready to go back to New York with me in the latter part of September. We will be gone but a few weeks, and can be settled in the new mansion I've given orders for, before the winter is here. Shall it be so?"

"Say 'yes,' cubbie, and I done with it, as long as you don't intend to say 'no.' I see she wants to say 'yes,' Mr. Moore, and since it's got to be, the sooner the suspense is over, the better I'll like it!" and with a great sigh, the ruffian kissed the forehead of his child and put her hand in that of Philip. With that act he had given away to another the most cherished of his possessions. But children never realize the pang which rends the parent heart, when they leave the parent nest and fly to new bowers. "All I shall be good for now, will be to keep you in spendin' money, I s'pose. You're going to marry a fashionable young man, you know, cubbie, and he'll want you tricked out in the latest style. How much can you spend before I get back?" and he pulled his leather money-bag out of his pocket.

"I haven't the least idea, father."

"Sure enough, you haven't. You'll have to keep count of the dollars, when you get her, Mr. Moore; for never having been indulged in the pastime of her sex, going a-shopping, she won't know whether she ought to spend ten dollars or a hundred. Like as not, she'll get a passion for the pretty amusement, to pay for having been kept back in her infancy. You'd better get some of your women friends to go 'long with you, pass. Here's, then, for the beginning." He poured a handful or more of gold into her lap.

"Nay, Mr. Willie, you need not indulge her in any thing beyond your means, upon my account; for—although she may have to conform to more modern fashions, as she has already done, since moving among others who do—she will never look so lovely to me in any other dress, as in those quaint, old-fashioned ones she wore when I learned to love her. And Alice, whatever other pretty things you buy or make, I request you to be married in a costume made precisely like that you wore last summer—will you?"

The ruffian heard, two or three times, on his way up the river, from boatmen whom he hailed, of Ben's having been seen only a short way ahead of him, and he, with the sheriff, had little doubt but they should capture him immediately upon their arrival at Willie's mill. But upon reaching their destination they found that was not true. The men had seen him hovering about the mill, and Pa as had given him his dinner only a few hours before. When he came to the house, looking, as she said, "like a poor old dog," scratching what I give him and trotting off to the woods ag'in."

Philip was summoned from the mill and the woods secured, but no further trace of the fugitive could be discovered. They kept up the search for a week, when the sheriff was obliged to return. David Wilde wished to believe, with the officer, that Ben had fled the country and gone off to distant parts; but he could not persuade himself to that effect. He still felt as if the unseen enemy was somewhere near. However, nothing further

could be done; so, cautioning the house-servants to keep a good watch over the premises, and the mill hands to see that the property was not fired at night, or other mischief done, he returned for his daughter.

"Give Pallas this new dress to be made up for the occasion, and tell her to be swift in her preparations, for the time is short. It will be a month, Alice, before I see you again—a whole long month—and then I hope for no more partings. I shall bring Mr. and Mrs. Raymond to the wedding, with your permission," said Philip, with other parting words, which being whispered we can not relate, as he placed her on the sail boat, well laded down with boxes and bales containing the necessary "dry goods and groceries" for the *fete*.

"We'll charter a steam-tug next time," growled the raftsmen, looking about him on the various parcels.

CHAPTER XI.

A MEETING IN THE WOODS

PALLAS was in "her elements." There's nothing a genuine cook likes so well as to be given *carte blanche* for a wedding. If the Wibles had invited a hundred guests to stay with them a fortnight, she would have hardly increased the measure of her preparations. No wonder the old soul was happy in the prospect of the really excellent match her daughter was to make, as well as in the promise that she was to go with her and take the culinary department of the new household under her charge.

"We's goin' to lib soon whar' de coons has a gives us a do us some good, Saturn. We can go to de city and more like 'spectable colored quality should. An' de house'll be taken now, and I'm to keep de keys of all de doors up a I—and young miss is will set at de head ob de table, with plenty of silver, as my miss-ess have allers done. An' you'll have to make some pride about you, and get ober head so sloppy. Nothin' hear nor see any ting so our as as we goin' look into dat happy family. Now, Saturn, don't you let me catch you eatin' or eatin' a single err, 'cause I want 'em all for cake. Masser's brought home twenty dozen, with a daintier one each. I want chery one dem pinks lays. An' you'll get 'em chickens up good and fat, an' dem wild turkeys in de pen. Dis is a fine country for a cook, arter all. I've been reckonin' up, an' I find we can have wild turkey an' partridges and snipe and venison and chicken, an' masser's brought home chery ting from de grocery-stores a pusson could ask. Whar's dat citron now? Saturn, has you been in dat citron? Laws! I catch you in dat, you'll nebbber forget it! Stop eatin' dem raisins! I declar' to

gracious, ef I trus' you to chop a few raisins for me, you eat half ef 'em up. Clear out de kitchen—immedjitly! I'd rudder get 'long alone."

Poor Saturn had to "fly round" more than was agreeable to his temper; but he contrived to keep up his strength and his spirits upon such a system, and he tried to be excessively useful.

"Well, well, dis argumint does look all; he's gettin' old and rickety, my nigger is, and I s'pose I mus' hammer him a little. His work is set on de good times ob dis world. I's 'raid he'll have to gib up eatin' and sleepin' when he comes to die. Dar' ain't no eatin' and drinkin' *ther'*, Saturn; no marryin' nor givin' in marriage."

"Whar for? Is eatin' wicked, Pallas?"

"Not on dis yearth, where it is a necessary evil. But *dar'*—dar's better things. We'll sing dar', Saturn," she continued, anxious to rekindle the religious ardor which she was fearful of cooling by her picture of the purely spiritual pleasures of the next world. "We'll set under de tree ob life, by side de beautiful river, and sing all de hymns and psalms;" and she struck up, in a voice of rich melody,

"Oh Canaan, my happy home,
Oh, how I long for thee!"

While her husband joined in the strain with equal fervor.

Alice loved to hear them singing at their work; not only because of their musical voices, but the enthusiasm, the joy and expectation swelling through them, awakened her own young soul to hope and prayer.

A happier face than hers, as she sat in the little parlor, sewing upon the wedding garments, it would be difficult to find—a kind of intense radiation from the inner content and love within shining through her features. When a young girl is about to marry the man she loves, with the full approval of her judgment and the consent of parents and friends, when her heart is full of hope, when she looks in scorn at her own happy thoughts, as she sits quietly sewing upon them and gathering berries which are to enhance her beauty in *leaves*, then she experiences the most blessed portion of her life.

The marriage of promise rested upon the house. All its domestic activity was pervaded by thinking and preparation. And yet there was a shadow—a high shadow, which at times would darken and again entirely disappear. It was the dread of Ben. The men of the land reported having caught glimpses of some one who they were quite sure was he, at different times, in different lonely places in the forest.

Saturn came in, one day, with the whites of his eyes of frightful interference, averring that a ghost had run after him in the woods. What could be the purpose of a person thus hovering about in concealment? Surely nothing good. Alice was not herself, personally, much afraid. She did not think Ben would

harm her, but she felt that he was hanging about, that his eye watched every preparation, that he would know when Philip came, and she was afraid he would have another opportunity to attempt his life. The courage which would not quail on the battle-field will fall before a secret and unknown evil. Even the railsguard, brave and powerful as he was, felt that treachery which springs from such a source. Many a time he went out with his rifle on his shoulder, resolved that if he met with the wretched and desperate youth, he would deal with him severely. His search was always in vain. Alice gave up all her rambles, much as she longed to get again into the heart of the whispering pine-forest.

One afternoon, when her father was at the mill, and Philip, as usual, busy in the kitchen, as she sat sewing and singing to herself in a low voice, the bright room suddenly grew dark, and looking up at the open window, she saw Ben standing there gazing at her. If she had not known of his vicinity, she would not have recognized him at the first glance; his face was haggard, his eyes bloodshot, his hair long and tangled, his clothing soiled and worn.

"Don't scream!" he begged, as he saw that she perceived him, in a voice so hollow that it checked the cry rising to her lips. "I ain't going to harm you. I wouldn't harm a hair of your head—not to save the neck yer so anxious to see hanging from the gallows. I know where your father is, and I just crept up to have a look at you. You look happy and content, Alice Wilde. See me! How do you like your work?"

"It is *not* my work, Ben, and you know it. Do not blame me. I pity you; I pray for you. But do go away from her—do go! I would rather you would harm me than to harm those I love. Oh, if you really care for me, go away from this spot—leave me to my happiness, and try and be happy yourself. Be a man. Go, Ben—let us alone. If you do *not* go, you will certainly be taken by others, and perhaps perished!"

"Catch a weasel asleep, but you can't catch me. You may put twenty men on the watch. How pleasant it must be for you to sit here making your wedding-clothes; I think of it rights, as I lay on the hemlock boughs, with my eyes wide open, staring up at the stars. What's that song I used to hear to hear you sing so well, Alice?"

"*They made her a grave too cold and damp
For a soul so warm and true;
And she's gone to the lake of the Deadly Swamp,
Where, all night long, by the firefly lamp,
She paddles her light canoe.*"

The maiden shuddered to her heart's core as his voice rose wild and mournful in the sweet tune to which the lullaby was set. "Ha! ha! Alice, it's the same little canoe that you used to come up to the mill in so often, in those pleasant old times—"

“And her fire-fly lamp I soon shall see,
Her paddle I soon shall hear;
Long and loving our life shall be,
And I’ll hide the maid in a cypress-tree,
When the footstep of death is near.”

Alice seemed to be listening to her own dirge;

“Away to the Dismal Swamp he speeds—
His path was rugged and sore:
Through tangled juniper, beds of reeds,
Through many a fen, where the serpent feeds,
And man never trod before!”—

And with an unearthly shriek he bounded away through the garden and into the woods, leaving Alice so overcome, that Pallas, who had been attracted to the door by the strange voice, brought her the “camfire” bottle to restore her.

“He’s a ravin’ maniac, that poor boy is, my chile. He ought to be catch’d and put in de ‘sylum at once ‘fore harm’s done. Mercy, chile, I was jist goin’ to take down de rifle to ‘fend my pick’ninny. I was ‘traid he’d t’ar you all to pieces, like a ragin’ wild beas’.”

“You wudn’t have had courage to fire, would you? I’m sure I shudn’t.”

“In course I shud have had courage. S’pose I’d stan’ by and see my chile tote’d off into the woods by a madman? Tush! even a hen’ll fight for her chickens. If I hadn’t a rifle, I’d spring on ‘im, tooth and nail, ef he laid a hand on my chile;” and the old negro woman breathed hard, holding herself erect, and looking so determined, that she inspired courage in the one who regarded her.

“Then I shall choose you for my body guard,” said Alice, “for I begin to feel like a little chick in a big field, with an unseen hawk in the air which might pounce on it at any time. Oh, Pallas, didn’t he look fearful?”

“Awful, missus, awful! We can’t be too kerful of a fanatick—and poor Ben’s got to be one, sure ‘nuff. Poor Ben! a year ago he was as merry a young pesson as dese yere ole eyes can see; and so willin’ and kind, allers lookin’ out to do a little service, bringin’ us game and berries, and makin’ us furnitur’ and fixin’ about de house—ready to work all day, jist to hab you say, ‘Tank you Ben,’ or gib him one smile. I jes’ wish dis weddin’ was suthin’. I has a sense as suthin’ is goin’ to happen. And you know, chile, when ole Pallas has a sense, it allers comes to suthin’.”

“Don’t tell me of it, if you have, Pallas, for I’m nervous enough already. There comes father now. I feel safe when he is near.”

Upon hearing her account of Ben’s looks and words, the raftsmen resolved more firmly than ever to take him into custody if possible. Leaving Pallas, who was a better man than her husband, with a double-barreled gun, to defend the house,

necessary, in their absence, he summoned his full force and hunted the woods for twenty-four hours without success. He then stationed two men in the outskirts, in view of the house, to be relieved every eight hours by two others, and to keep up the watch, on double wages, day and night, till the enemy was taken or the wedding over.

On the third day of his watch, one of the men, while standing by the garden fence, eating his lunch, his rifle leaning against the rails beside him, was suddenly knocked down, and by the time he got upon his feet again, he saw Ben Perkins vanishing into the forest with the weapon on his shoulder. The news of this mishap was any thing but encouraging, for the chances of his doing mischief were increased tenfold by the fact of his having possession of a loaded gun. Yet Alice sang and sewed, praying silently to Heaven that all might be well, and, happy in the faith and hope of youth, went on with her preparations; and Pallas finished shelves full of frosted cake and other niceties; and Saturn hewed wood and brought water, receiving his reward as he went, from his wife's benevolent hand; and Mr. Wilde was alert and vigilant, ready for all emergencies.

It was now near the middle of September; the blackberries were gone, and the grapes were yet green and unripe. Pallas was in want of wal-plums to pickle, and of wal-nuts to flavor some of the dressings for dishes yet to be cooked. She set forth into the woods, having no occasion for personal fears, and not finding what she desired, wandered farther into their depths than she had intended. Suddenly she started with a, "Hi! hi! what's this?"

"If you've any thing in that basket a starving man can eat, give it to me." It was Ben Perkins who spoke, from behind a fallen tree, where he was crouching, lifting his emaciated face to her view.

"I hab nothin' at all; and ef I had, why should I gib it to you, when you's makin' us all de trouble you can?"

"You've turned against me too, Aunt Pallas," he said, in so hopeless a tone, that she paused from her purpose of getting away as fast as she could. "I've done you many favors in days gone by; I've never refused to lend you a helping hand, and I've never done nothin' to injure you; but you, too, will try to get me on the gallows. Go and tell 'em where I am, if you want to. I don't know as I've strength to get away any longer. It's a week since any thing has passed my lips but a nest full of birds' eggs I climbed up after yesterday. Say, want you to let me a piece of bread?"

"You go home wid me, and I'll take you off, and you shall hab all de bread you want. Nobody's starvin' you but yourself."

"Hah! ha! you're a cote 'un, ain't you now? I don't think I shall put my foot into that trap."

"Well, den you gib me dat gun what you've got dar'.

us to revenge our enemies. Chris' says, Do good to dem dat despically use yer. And nobody has used yer bad. He says, Love yer enemies. Oh, Ben! Ben! ef insid' of bein' de wicked ben' you has you had prayed to de Lord Jesus to save yer from temptation, and some yer could be happy in de heah, to see yer good, yer would be an an' here in de street. People has had troubles like yer. Don't think yer de only one, poor boy. Dad's plenty on teahs for Chris' to wipe away on dis yer face.

"I don't know nuthin' about it. I've never been taught. 'Tain't natural for a man to love his enemies. I can't do it. But if I thought you'd pray me and pray for me - if I thought Miss Alice would pray for me, I'd give up wicked thoughts and try to govern myself."

"Sae does pray for yer, Ben, wid all her heart, every time she prays. I've seen her cry about yer many times. Sae'd gib her right hand, in'st', to kiss you good and happy. Masser's sorry for yer, too; he lo'ed so much of yer, once; but coorse he can't let you kill his friends. Come, now, Ben, you promise to do right, and I'll stand by yer t'ra thick and thin."

"Some of the time I'm good, and some I'm bad. I didn't use to be so. It's only wickedness has made me so ugly. I don't know how to try to be better."

"May I pray for you, Ben?"

"Yes—if you want to be such a friend," he said, reluctantly.

The good old colored woman went down on her knees there upon the mossy cushion of the chair, pouring out her soul in prayer for the poor and lonely who sat, with his chin in his hands, listening to her appeal in his behalf. Tears streamed down her cheeks, the earnestness, the pathos, of her sincere petitions to that great Father who she seemed to believe had power to convert and take care of him, and to adopt him as a child, to cure his lonely, sad, misanthropic nature. His soul accompanied her "Amen."

"I shouldn't be such a baby as to cry," he said, when she had finished, "but I was it so weak; but when a fellow starts in work he's none of the bravest. I thank you, though, for your prayer, Aunt Pallas, I'll be a better man every day. He's the best man I ever met. Props if I keep on in de way, I'll want to be a minister of de church. That it would you ever get me and I'd be the best man, as you promised. If you break your promise, and I don't be a minister, I'll be a better man, I'll be a better man, I'll be a better man. If you want to make a Christian of me, you must do it."

"Never will I," said Pallas; "I'll be back here in an hour with bread and meat. You'd better make up your mind, by and time, to go home wid me, and get you up to de church, and let him do as he feels is best wid yer. He'll set you free, be sure."

She took the gun and hastened off with it, glad to get that means of harm away from him. She was firmly resolved not

to break her promise to him, much as she desired that he might be put in safe quarters, and that the inevitable suspense be done away with. As he had confessed himself so changeable in his moods, she did not rely much upon his present word. Reaching home, she stowed the rifle away, saying nothing about it, and filling her basket with some small food, she returned to the appointed spot. To her surprise, Ben was not there. She waited a few minutes, but he did not come.

"I can't bear to know a human creature is starving to death," she muttered, setting the basket in a branch of the fallen tree. "I'll leave him here—and now I've kept my promise, I'll go straight home and tell master all about it, and he can take such steps as he thinks best."

She gave a graphic account of the whole interview to the railman as soon as he came in to tea. When she came to that part of his confession where he spoke of being about to choke Philip, while on the river, Alice turned pale, saying, with a shudder, as she recalled one of those visions which haunted her dreams during that terrible period of the journey of her lover with his deadly enemy:

"Yes! yes! I did—but it was in a dream. I beheld the skiff gliding along in the sunlight, Philip sleeping, his arm under his head, and his carpet bag for a pillow: Ben was sleeping over him, his face white as ashes, his teeth clenched, his hands creeping toward Philip's throat. I sprang upon him—I held his hands—I drew him back—I screamed—and the scream awoke me, and father rushed into the boat to see what was the matter. You ridiculed my nightmare, father, don't you now?"

"Poor boy," said the railman, wiping a tear from his cheek, when his servant had come back with her relation. "I'm right down sorry for the lad. And when you are married and out of the way, jess, I'd take him in hand, and try and make him man. He'll make a man yet."

"He ain't to blame for his faults, seeing he's never had no good brought up. I'll teach him the New Testament doctrine of he'll only let me, even Miss Alice is 'sary," murmured Philip.

Mr. Wilde went to the spot indicated by Philip—the basket of food had been taken away, but no one was in the vicinity.

CHAPTER XII.

FAMILY AFFAIRS.

It was the day before the wedding. The house was in order to the full satisfaction of the small household. Vases, worthy of the occasion, lined the sideboard to the dining wing. Philip, with his suite, including the minister who was to officiate, was

expected to arrive by supper-time. The last touches were given to the arrangements, and Alice was dressed to receive her guests by the middle of the afternoon. The motherly heart of her old nurse was so absorbed in her, that she came very near making fatal mistakes in her dressings and sauces. Every five minutes she would leave her work to speak with the restless young creature who, beautiful with hopes and tears, flattered her from room to room, trying to occupy her mind so that her heart would not beat quite so unreasonably.

"They are coming!" she cried, at last, having seen out for the hundredth time to the top of a little knoll which gave her a farther view of the river. How gladly the ripples sparkled, how lightly the winds danced, to her joyous eyes. "Oh, Pallas, they are coming! What shall I do?" And she hid her face in the old woman's bosom, as if flying from what she yet so eagerly

expected.
"Do, darlin'?" Oh, my child, you got to be a woman, now; no more little child, to run away an' hide. Masser Moore berry proud of his wife dat is to be. Don't make him 'sashed, darlin'."

at once.

at once.

"There, nurse, I don't feel so startled any more. I think I can meet them, clergyman as well, without flinching."

Her father, who had been on the back seat, took a final sniff, and went down to meet the party. Alice stood on the steps, as she had done upon the day of Philip's first arrival. A soft rose glowed in either cheek, which was all the outward sign of the inward tumult as she saw her brother, soon sitting near enough to recognize and greet her. She saw, in the boat, Philip, the minister, Mr. and Mrs. Raymond, and a young lady whom she had never met, and a sister of Mr. Raymond's son.

It was the proudest moment of Paul's life when that young lady turned and smiled at him, exclaiming, "in a few years I did not

"I don't wonder you refused me, cousin Philip. I did not know such things existed, except in poetry and painting."

known such things existed, except in poetry and paintings.
 Pallas, standing in the door, made out the Italian and the
 two Americans, and she looked at them with a keenly different
 eye from that with which she had looked at the English, but
 to her eyes they were all the same, and she saw them as people, not
 as nations. She saw the English as well as the Americans, and she
 saw the Americans as well as the English, and she saw the
 English and the Americans as well as the English and the Americans.

“This is my cousin Virginia,” said Virginia, kissing

"I have come to wish you joy, Alice," said Virginia, kissing her cheek. "I have come to wish you joy, Alice," said Virginia, kissing her cheek.

Her loss, with interest, and a quick—quick! Who

"For de news sake, B. B. come here quick—quick!" W. L.

be dat comin' up de walk wid masse, and de company? Ef dat ain't little Virginia Moore growed up, who is it?"

"It's Virginny, sure 'nuff," ejaculated her husband.

In the mean time, that young lady herself began to look about with quick, inquiring glances. She peered into the rufous man's face anxiously, and again toward the old servants, a perplexed look coming over her face as she re-entered the house.

"You needn't say a word, Miss Virginny—it's us, certain—Pallas and Saturn, your father's people, who had you in our arms ebery day till you was eight year old. You do remember old Pallas, don't you now, honey? My! my! what a han' some, tall girl you is growed—the pictur' of your father. Yer a Moore tra and tra, missus. My ole eyes is glad to see you."

"Hi! hi! Miss Virginny?" chuckled Saturn, bowing and scraping.

"Come 'long, and let me get yer bonnet off. I want to take a good look at ye, honey. Missus Alice's mother was a Moore—she was like *her* in dder, small, and pretty, and thin like; but ye's a perfect Moore, Miss Virginny. My! my! I know 'em all, root and branch. I had my own man, Messer Philip, belonged to our Mooreses, but Messer Willie he took 'em on." She had the visitor's bonnet off by this time, rubbing all the time, and oblivious, in her excited state, of her vulgar games.

"Yes, Miss Virginia," said the red-skinned fellow, his powerful figure up to its full height, "I am that brother-in-law you have been taught to detest and be ashamed of. You would hardly have come to the wedding if you had known what poor company you were to get in."

All those of the company who knew him looked at him in surprise, for he had dropped his familiar form of speech, and took on the air of a superior man. Virginia looked at him a moment calmly, taking, as it were, an inventory of the mind and heart outside of that which she knew and guessing through the so noble though weather-beaten features.

"I do not see anything to be ashamed of," she said, with a smile, giving him her hand, frankly, in a steady manner. "I was but a little child, you know, when your quarrel was with our family concerned. Do you know I have been wondering how you had heard. If my father wronged you, David Wilde, it is time for you to forgive it. Let up on that thimble against the back."

Her lip trembled over her last remark.

"Dear Virginia! is it possible that Alice is so fond of you?"

"An aunt? You Philip and you are about as nearly your third cousin. It's rather curious, isn't it?"

"We'll talk it over after supper," said the host. "Pallas, our guests are hungry. The river lounge occupies the opposite."

Pallas wanted no further talk. Her only object now was to have the means of satisfying any amount of hunger, she retired, with her subordinate husband, to clean up the feast.

"I spects I'll spile half dose things, I's so festerate I. Did you mind whar' I put that pepper, Samra? I declar' I can't say w'e'ller I put it in de gravy or in de coffee. I j'st tinn'ed and put it in de scotch on de stove, whar I was tink' I know curious things happens. Dear! dear! I put it in de coffee, see now, and now dat's all to be throwed away! 'Spects things won't be fit to eat. Why don' you fly roan' and grin' more coffee? You is de stupidest nigger!"

In spite of such tirades, however, the supper was served in the season and with due seasoning. Gay conversation prevailed; but Alice, though bright and attractive, felt uneasy. Her glance frequently wandered to the windows and open doors. A certain dark figure had so often started up in unexpected places, and seemed to hover about so when least expected, that she could not be entirely at her ease. It was true that several men were on guard, and that Ben had not been heard of for a week; but he was so sly, so subtle, she felt almost as if he might drop out of the roof or come up out of the earth at any instant.

Philip was warned to be on the look-out. He laughed and said he was a match for Ben in a fair fight, and if the other had no firearms, he could take care of himself.

Long after the rest of the party, fatigued with their journey, had retired for the night, David, Willie, Alice, Philip, and Virginia sat up, talking over the past, present, and future.

Alice, who had never known the particulars of her mother's marriage and death, except as she had gathered hints from her old nurse, now listened with tenting eyes to brief explanations of the past.

Her father, in his youth, had been a medical student, poor, but possessed of talent—a charity student, in fact, who, one day, at the risk of his own life, saved the lovely daughter of Mortimer Moore from the attack of a rabid dog in the street. He had actually choked the ferocious creature to death in his desperate grip. Grateful for the noble and inestimable service, the father invited him to the house to receive a substantial token of his gratitude in the shape of a sum of money sufficient to carry him through his course of study. But the courage, the modesty, the nobleness of his course of study. But the courage, the modesty, the nobleness and respectful admiration of her preserver, made a deep impression upon Alice Moore—it was a case of love at first sight upon both sides—they were young and foolish—the father opposed the match with contempt and indignation. His refusal roused the ire of the poor student; he was resolved to marry the woman he loved, in spite of poverty. They fled, accompanied by Philip, the attendant of the young girl; the father refused to forgive them; and then, when sickness and suffering, untempered by the luxuries of wealth, came upon his delicate wife, the young husband realized what he had done in persuading her away from her home and the habits of her

life. If he had first finished his studies and put himself in the way of gaining even a modest living, and so had chosen to share such a lot, he would have done right in following the dictates of his heart. Now he felt that he had been exceedingly rash. A year of strange, wild happiness, mixed with sorrow and privation, passed, and the wife became a mother. Pallas nursed her with tireless assiduity; her husband, bound to her sick couch, could not exert himself as he might have done alone; they grew desperately poor—he could not see her suffer without humbling his pride, and willing to her father to send her, not him, the means necessary to her comfort and recovery. They were coldly denied. Privation somewhat, but only grief, and trouble more, retarded her recovery—she fell into a decline, and died in his arms, who swore a great oath over her beloved corpse to forsake a world so unjust, so cruel, so unhappy. Sending a bitter message to her father, he disappeared with their infant child. The old Colonel, however, who had also persuaded her husband to accompany them, went with him as if her mother to the child. They traveled to the far West—much further in those days than now—and when they first settled where they now were, they were isolated in the wilderness.

Mr. Wilde took up his portion of government land. By the time other emigrants had made settlements down the river, he had made enough from it to purchase more. He tilled the soil with his own hands, and carried it down to where it was wanted. As years passed, he employed hands, built a mill, and as towns grew up within market distance, found his success increasing upon him. During all this time he had maintained his scorn against the civilized world; natives strong and wayward like him, are subject to prejudice—and because one haughty old aristocrat had allowed a fair child to perish neglected, he condemned refined society *en masse*. He adopted the conversation and manners, to great degree, of those by whom he was surrounded.

All these things explained to Philip many long graces in the talk and habits of Mr. Wilde—the possession of books, the knowledge of men—which had hitherto challenged his curiosity.

It had been the object of the rashman to bring up his daughter in strict seclusion from the world he despised; he had not thought of further consequences than to keep her innocent, unselfish, unsuspicious, and free from guile. Chance threw Philip in their way. His frankness, pleasant temper, and fluency excited his fashionable graces, in Mr. Wilde's estimation; more intimate association with him and much to wear away the prejudices he had been bringing up against the so-called world, and when it came to the certainty that his daughter must choose between one of the rough and unpolished men around her, and a man like Philip, he could not counsel from himself that Philip was his choice.

"And what do you think brought me out here at this critical

moment?" asked Virginia. "I come to throw myself upon Philip's charity—to become a pensioner upon his bounty. Yes, Mr. Wille, upon closing up my father's estate, there was absolutely nothing left for his only child. He lived up to all that he possessed, hoping, before his poverty became known, that I would make a brilliant match. A fortnight ago my lawyer told me there would be nothing left but a small annuity from my mother, which they can not touch. It is a sum barely sufficient to dress me plainly—it will not begin to pay my board. So I, unable to bear my discomfiture alone, friendless, sorrowful, thought it less bitter to begin anew among strangers than in the scenes of my former triumph. I came on to beg Philip to find me some little rural school where I might earn my bread and butter in peace, unstung by the coldness of past worshippers. I'll make a good teacher—don't you think so?—so commanding?"

Yet she sighed heavily, despite her attempt at pleasantry. It was easy to be seen that earning her own living would go hard with the accomplished daughter of Mortimer Moore.

"But Philip will never let you go away from us, I am sure," said Alice's soft voice, caressingly.

"I said she goes to a home of her own," added her cousin, with a mischievous smile. "I wouldn't be guilty of match-making; but I own I had a purpose in asking my friend Irving to stand as godfather with Virginia. How do you like him, my sweet cousin?—be honest now."

"Not as well as I have liked some other men, sir?"

"Oh, of course, not yet; but you'll grow to it; and he has no stain upon his name—he isn't even a flour merchant or mill-owner."

"You haven't told me what he is yet," said Virginia, with a slight show of interest.

"He's my book-keeper."

"Oh, Philip! you're jesting."

"No, indeed, I'm not. He has not a cent, saving his salary; but he's a gentleman and a scholar, and has seen better days."

"Well, I like him, anyhow," she remarked, presently.

"You want to encourage him to pay his addresses to you. You could teach school, and he could keep books. You could take a set of three rooms, and war upon yourselves. I'd promise to furnish the rooms with dignity, delf, and rag carpeting."

"You are generous, Philip."

"And to send you an occasional barrel of flour and load of reeking kindling wood."

"My prospects brighten."

"Don't tease the girl," said the raucous man, "she'll do better'n you think for you. Since my own chick has deserted me for another nest, I don't know but I shall adopt Virginia myself."

"I wish you would," and the great black eyes were turned to him with a mournful, lonely look. "Is anybody else so

happy and blessed, they do not need me. But I should love to wait upon you, and cheer you, sir."

It was a great change which misfortune was working in the spirit of the proud and ambitious girl. Philip, who knew her so well, regarded her present mood with surprise.

"Well, well, without joking, I intend to adopt this orphan girl. She's the sister of my own dead wife, and she shall share equally with my little Alice in all that the rough old raftsmen has."

"Which won't be much, father," said Alice, with a smile, glancing around upon their humble forest home.

"Don't be too sure of that, little one. I haven't felled pine logs and sawed lumber for fifteen years to no account. Did you think your two dresses a year, your slippers, and straw-hats had even up all the money-bags I brought home with me upon my trips? Here's a check for five thousand dollars, pass, to furnish that new house with; and when Philip gets time to tend to it, the cash is ready to put up a steam saw-mill near about here, somewhere—the income to be yours. It'll bring you in a nice little bit of pocket-money. And if Virginia concludes to accept that pale-faced book-keeper, that's an equal sum laid aside for her—and home and money as much as she wants in the mean time. It shan't be said the old raftsmen's pretty daughters had no wedding portion."

Virginia took his rough hand in her two white ones, and a tear mingled with the kiss which she pressed upon it.

CHAPTER XII

THE TORNADO.

When Alice came out of her room dressed for the marriage ceremony she looked quaintly lovely. Old Parris smiled as she looked at her, and her father wiped the diamonds again and again from his eyes; for it was as if the fair young bride of long ago had come to life.

Philip had made it an especial request that she should dress in a costume similar to that she wore when he first loved her; and her father had told her to provide no wedding robe, as he wished her to wear one of his own choosing. She had been attired in the bridal robe and veil, the high-heeled satin slippers, the long white gloves which had lain so many years in the mysterious trunk. Philip's gift, a banner of pearls, shimmered above a brow not less pure—set in the golden masses of her hair.

Virginia laid aside her mourning for that day, appearing in a fleecy muslin robe, as bride-maid, and none the less, greatly on account of the simplicity of her dress. Her face had gained an

expression of gentleness which added very much to her superb attractions, and which was not unnoticed by her companion in the ceremonies.

The words had been said which made the betrothed pair man and wife. A more romantic wedding seldom has occurred than was this, in which wealth and elegance were so intimately combined with the rude simplicity of frontier life. To see those beautiful and richly-dressed ladies flitting in and out the modest house buried in the shadows of the western woods; the luxurious viands of the cook's producing served upon the plainest of telf, to have the delicate and the rough so contrasted, made a pretty and effective picture against the sunshine of that September day. The spirit of the scene was felt and enjoyed by all, even the venerable clergyman—rich voices and gay laughter blent with the murmur of the river—fond, admiring eyes followed every motion of the bride. The bride! Where was the bride?

She had been standing on the lawn, just in front of the door, with Mrs. Raymond, who was saying:

“Happy is the bride the sun shines on,”

just the previous moment. Mrs. Raymond had run down to the river-bank, and was throwing pebbles in the water.

Mr. Wilde, ever apprehensive, ever vigilant, had just missed her, and was turning to inquire of the bridegroom, when a shriek, wild, sharp, agonizing, paralyzed for an instant every faculty of the listeners.

“Great God, it is that madman!” burst from the father's lips.

Philip and he sprung out-of-doors together, just in time to see her borne into the forest, flung like an infant over the shoulder of her abductor, who was making great leaps along the path, with the speed and strength of a panther. The two men appointed as guards were running after him. Mr. Wilde sprung for his rifle—the bridegroom waited for nothing.

“Don't shoot!” he shouted to the men; “you will kill the girl!”

Philip reached and distanced the men; the rascal, strong and tall, and accustomed to the woods, passed him, even madly as he exerted himself.

“If I only dared to fire,” he breathed, between his clenched teeth. “If he would give me just one second's fair and square aim—but my child, she is his shield!”

Two or three times the two foremost pursuers came in sight, almost within arm's reach of the terrified girl, crying, “Philip! father!” in such piercing tones of entreaty.

“Can not you save me, Philip?” once he was so near, he heard the question distinctly—but the ferocious creature who grasped her gave a tremendous whoop and bounded, leaping over logs and fallen trees, brooks, and every obstacle with such speed, that his own feet seemed to be loaded with lead, and he to be oppressed with that powerlessness which binds us during

terrible dreams. He flew, and yet, to his agony of impatience, he seemed to be standing still.

"Philip—father—Philip!"

How faint, how far away. At length they heard her no more; they had lost the clue—they knew not which way to pursue. The forest grew wilder and denser; it was dim at mid-day under those tall, thick-standing pines; and now the afternoon was wearing toward sunset.

"Philip," said the raftsmen in a hoarse voice, "we must separate—each man of the party must take a different track. Here is my rifle; I will get another from the men. Use it if you dare—use it, *at all risks*, if that devil seeks to harm her. His strength must give up some time."

"Don't despair, father," said the new-made husband, but his own heart was cold in his bosom, and he felt so desperate that he could have turned the rifle upon himself.

Not knowing but that he was going further from instead of nearer to the objects of his search, with every step, he had to pause frequently to listen for some sound to guide him. Wandering on in this wild, unsatisfactory way, his brain growing on fire with horror, suddenly he heard a sharp voice, chanting:

"I'll hide the maid in a cypress tree,
When the footstep of death is near."

The next moment he came face to face with Ben Perkins—but no Alice was in his arms now, nor was she anywhere in sight.

"Fiend! devil! what have you done with my wife?"

His eyes shone like coals out of a face as white as ashes, as he confronted his enemy with a look that would have made any sane man tremble; but the wretch before him only stared him vacantly in the face with a mournful smile, continuing to sing:

"And her fire-fly lamp I soon shall see,
Her paddle I soon shall hear."

"Where is she—answer me, devil?"

The hand of Philip clutched the lunatic's throat, and with the strength of an anguish as superhuman as the transient power of the other had been, he shook him fiercely as he repeated the question. The madman wilted under his grasp, but as soon as the hold was relaxed, he slid from under it, and sprang away.

"They make her a grave too cold and damp,"

he chanted, darting from tree to tree, as Philip, hopeless of making him tell what he had done with Alice, tried to shoot him down.

"He has murdered her," he thought; and getting a momentary chance, he fired, but without effect; Ben climbed a tree, springing from branch to branch like a squirrel, until he reached the top, and like a squirrel, chattering nonsense to himself. "If I had another shot I would put an end to his miserable existence."

muttered Philip, turning away to trace, if possible, the track of the man, and find where he had dropped Alice.

Soon he came out upon a small, open, elevated space—the river was upon one side, the woods all around. Something strange was in the air—nature seemed to be listening—not a breeze rippled the water or made a leaf quiver—he felt hot and suffocated. Despite of all his mental misery, he, too, pressed and listened like the elements—his ear caught a far-away murmur. The day had been very warm for that season of the year; it grew, now, oppressive. A low bank of dark clouds lay along the south and west, hanging over the prairie on the opposite side of the stream—it was such a bank of clouds as would seem to threaten rain before midnight; but even while he gazed, a great black column wheeled up from the mass and whirled along the sky with frightful rapidity. The distant murmur grew to a roar, and the roar deepened and increased until it was like the surf-swell of a thousand oceans. Stunned by the tumult, fascinated by the sublime terror of the spectacle, he followed with his gaze the course of the destructive traveler, which flew forward, sweeping down upon the country closer and more close. The air was black—light fell upon every thing—he saw the tornado—holding in its bosom dust, stones, branches of trees, roots of houses, a dark, whirling mass of objects, which it had caught up as it ran—reach the river, and with an instinct of self-preservation, threw himself flat upon the ground, behind a rock which jutted up near him. He could tell when it smote the forest, for the tremendous roar was pierced through with the snapping, crackling sound of immense trees, broken off like pipe-stems and hurled in a universal crash to the earth.

A short time he crouched where he was, held down, in fact, pressed, flattened, hurt by the trampling winds; but nothing else struck him, and presently he struggled to his feet.

What a spectacle met him, as he looked to the forest from which he had so lately emerged! A vast and overwhelming rain, in the midst of which it seemed impossible that any life, animal or vegetable, should have escaped. A desolation, such as poets have pictured as clinging to the "last man," came over the soul of Philip Moore. Where were his friends? Where that gay party he had invited from their distant homes to meet his wife? Where was Alice, his wife of an hour? His manhood yielded to the blow; he cowered and sobbed like a child.

The darkness passed over for a brief time, only to come again with the setting sun, which had sent some bright gleams of light before the deluge to fire the ruin, through the storms, before sinking from sight. A drenching rain fell in torrents, the wind blew cold and rough.

"I will search for her—I will find her, and die beside her mangled remains," murmured Philip, arising and turning toward the forest.

The incessant flashes of lightning were his only lamps as he struggled through the intricate mazes of fallen trees. It was a task which despair, not hope, prompted, to toil through rain and wind and darkness, over and under and through splintered trunks and tangled foliage, looking, by the lightnings' evanescent glare, for some glimpse of the white bridal robe of his beloved. The hours prolonged themselves into days and weeks to his suffering imagination, and still it was not morning. As if not content with the destruction already wrought, the elements continued to hurl their anger upon the prostrate wilderness; ever and anon the sharp tongue of the lightning would pick up some solitary tree which the wind had bent in its hurry; hail cut the fallen foliage, and the rain fell heavily. It was a strange bridal night.

Not knowing what moment he might stumble upon the crushed body of some one of his friends, Philip wandered through the storm. He felt more and more as if he were going mad—reason trembled and shuddered at his misfortunes. Two or three times he resolved to dash his brains out against a tree, to prevent himself the misery of going mad and yet living on in those dismal solitudes, till hunger conquered what grief refused to vanquish. Then the lightning would glimmer over some white object, perchance the bark freshly scored from some shattered trunk, and he would hurry toward it, calling, "Alice!" as once she had called, "Philip," through a less wretched night.

It seemed to him that if no other morning began to come before long, the morning of eternity must open its gates upon the world; the strength of the tempest was spent; only wild gushes of wind swept past; here and there a star looked down hurriedly through the drifting clouds; the solemn roll of the thunder resounded afar, like the drums of an enemy beating a retreat.

Exhausted, he sank at the foot of one of those Indian mounds common in western forests. A gleam of the vanishing lightning flickered over the scene. Hardly had it faded into darkness before a voice close to his side whispered his name; a warm hand felt through the night, touching his; a form glowing with life, soft, and tender, albeit its garments were cold and drenched, sunk into his outstretched arms.

"Yes, Philip, it is I—safe, unhurt. And you—are you uninjured?" He could not answer; his throat was choked with the sweetest tears which ever welled from a man's heart; he could only press her close, close, in the silence of speechless delight.

In that hour of reunion they knew not if they had a friend left; but the thought only drew them more near in heart than ever they had or could have been before. Weary and storm-beaten, but filled with a solemn joy, they clasped each other close and sank upon the wet sod, to sleep the sleep of exhaustion, until the morning should dawn upon them to light their search for their friends.

CHAPTER XIV.

GATHERING TOGETHER.

The first ray of morning startled the young couple from their sweet but troubled sleep.

"You shiver!" exclaimed Philip, looking at the damp, disordered attire of his wife; "I ought not to have allowed you to fall asleep in those wet garments."

"It is but a momentary chill, dear Philip. Oh, let us go and find my father. Certainty will be more endurable than this dreadful suspense."

They arose, pursuing their search through the gray dawn, which brightened soon into as glorious a September day as ever shone. There was no use in trying to convict Mother Nature of crime and bloodshed; she appeared totally unconscious of the waste and ruin she had spread over the land the previous day. Through the wrecked wilderness they struggled forward, silent, and looking in every direction for traces of their friends, and making their way, as correctly as they could discern it, with the river for a guide, toward the home which they expected to find overwhelmed and scattered by the storm.

It was four or five hours before they came in sight of the cabin, so tortuous was their course; in my times Alice had been obliged to rest, for hunger and fatigue were becoming overpowering, and now Philip had to support her almost entirely, as she clung to his arm.

"Take courage, dearest—there is the house, and standing, as I live!"

The storm, sweeping on, had just touched with its scattering edges the house, which was unroofed and the chimney blown down, and otherwise shaken and injured, though not totally demolished. As the two came in sight of it, they perceived old Pallas, sitting on the front step in an attitude of complete despondency, her apron thrown over her face, motionless and silent. She did not hear them nor see them until they stood by her side.

"Pallas! what is the news? Where is my father?"

The old woman flung her apron down with a mingled laugh and groan.

"Oh, my chile, my darlin', my pickaninny, is dat you, an' no mistake?" Springing up, she caught her young mistress to her bosom, and holding her there, laughed and scolded over her together. "Sence I's seen you safe ag'in, and young masser too, be' of you safe an' soun', as I never 'spected to behold on dis yearth ag'in, let me go now, 'long wid my ole man—Oh Lord, let thy sarvant depart in peace!"

"My father--have you heard from him since the storm?"

"No, darlin', not from one single soul, an' dis awful night. De ladies dey were wid me till de mornin' broke, den dey set out, cryin' and weepin' and wringin' deir hands, to look for all you wile was in de wood. Oh, dis has been a terrible season for a weddin'. I had a sense an' de time sartin' was goin' to happen. My poor ole man!"

"What's become of him?" asked Philip.

"De Lord above alone knows where he be now--oh! he. He was tuk right up to glory, wid his weddin' gown on. I see him sailin' off, but I couldn't help him. Laws! if he isn't a-goin' to faint dead over."

"Give her to me, and get something for her to eat and drink, if you can find it, Pallas. She's worn out."

"I've kep' up a fire in de kitchen, which is low, an' not much hurt. I'll spread a bed down dar' and lay her down on de floor till I make some right strong tea. Lord be merciful to me a sinner! It's times as make ole Pallas's heart ache. Come long wid her, masser--I'll tro a mattress on de floor. Dar', lay her down, I'll hab de tea direckly. Sech sights as I see yesterday is 'nuff to unsettle anybody as sots deir heart on de things ob dis worl'. When I heard my chile scream, I thought a knife went right tru me--I couldn' run, nor do nothin', I was jes' a weak and trimbler. Dar' I stood, lookin' into de woods, wid everybody out ob sight, when I hear de storm a-comin'. First I thought it was de river broking loose; I looked round, but dat was jes' as peaceable as a lamb. Here, honey, set up and drink yer tea. Den I thought de woods on fire, as dey was once, when dey made sech a roar, but dey wan't. Den I looked up to see if de sky was fihin', which was de first I saw ob de wind. It war' a-whirlin' and a-roarin' like eber so many thousand hundred mill-wheels. It look for all de worl' like a big barrel wid water pourin' tru. I was so scart I run back to de house, to turn' fer my ole man, who was settin' on de fence, lookin' de other way. But he didn' hear me. It went right past, knockin' me up ag'in de wall, as ef I war' nailed. I seen de air an' feel ob de flyin' things, chickens and pigs and hounds and trees, and I tuk my ole man right up off dat fence an' carried him up to de nex' worl'. I see him, wid my own eyes, ridin' off in de chariot ob de wind, way over de woods, way off, off, out ob sight. Oh, nuss-er, when I see him goin' so, I nuss' wish I was dead. I know Saturn was a foolish nigger, and mighty sleepy-headed. He wan't no use to me nuch--he was a great cross; but dat neller was a better hearted husband. He kin' me like a chile. And he was so fond ob presarved plums, and such a hand to help 'bout de kitchen--pears to me I han't no heart. Bah, laws, what business I to speak my troubles, and you neller to know where your own father is. If he ever can't come back, I'd jes' lay down an' die. Poor ole nigger no more use. Dar' "

Saturn tak away in de clouds, wid his bes' raiment on, as de Bible commands; and neber one mouful ob de weldin'-feas' which is stannin' on de table, and de rain leakin' down upon it—on! hit in?"

"Poor Pallas, I'm sorry for you. Bat, Philip, I must go—I feel stronger now."

"No, no, my own darling Alice, you are not fit for further exertion. Remain here in the hands of your nurse. Pallas, I leave my wife in your care. She is in a fever now. Chango her clothing and give her hot drinks. I must be off. Keep up heart, dearest, till I get back."

He had hastily disposed of a cup of tea and a few mouthfuls of food, kissed his bride, and was hurrying from the house, to go again into the woods for tidings, when a tumult outside drew all three to the door. Every one of the missing party, except poor old Strain, whose case was hopeless—and the raftsmen himself, were coming up in a group. Virginia and Mrs. Raymond had encountered them in their search for the clearing, and had led them out of the woods. Mr. Raymond and the clergyman had been together overtaken by the tempest; but it was not so severe, where they were, as in that part of the forest reached by Mr. Wilde and Philip. Trees had fallen before and around them, but they had escaped unharmed. Night coming on, and the ruin and changed character of the scene bewildering them, they had not been able to make their way out of the woods; and of course had suffered from anxiety in common with their friends. Their astonishment and joy at beholding the bride and groom in safety were only held in check by the uncertainty which hung about the fate of their host. Not one would enter the house until that fate was known; taking from Pallas the cakes and cold meat she brought them, they hastened away—all but Alice, who was really too ill from exposure and suffering to make any further effort.

"You must rest yourself, and try to be composed, honey. If your dear good father is really taken away, you hab much to be thankful for that yer not left unprotected in this black world. You've a husband as loves you as his heart's blood—and yer father himself will shine in de heaven above, to think how good he is all was made right, and you with some one to care for you 'fore you was taken away. Dar', dar', don't hurt yourself no more so. I cried all night, and now dese poor ole eyes hab no more tears left. When I thought I was left all alone—no masser, no missus, no husband—my heart was like a broken wheel. I feel better now. If masser war' here, I could do some good, spite of my 'flections. I mus' bustle roun' and get some food for all dese tired, hungry people to eat, and get dem wet clothes dried where de rain beat in. De table sot, just as it was, when I was out here goin' for to put de coffee on, and de fire on de hearth. My poor ole man—he's gone up, sure,

for I saw him go. Saturn'll neber eat no more woodchuck pie in dis life—hi! hi! Now, now, pickaninny, guess who's comin' and who they're a-bringin'. You needn't jump out of yer skin, chile, if it is yer own fader—hurt, too, I'm afraid, by the way he looks."

Alice sprung to the door. Philip was lending her father the aid of his strong young arm. Mr. Wilde walked with difficulty, and his arm hung down in a helpless manner.

"Oh, father, are you hurt?"

"Nothing to speak of—not worth mentioning—a little bruised and my left arm broken. Positively, I don't feel a bit of pain, since I see you unharmed, my darling."

"But you'll come to a realizing sense of it, by the time we have set it, after it's going so long unattended to," said Philip.

"If I groan, punish me for it," replied the sturdy raftsmen.

The broken limb was soon set and splintered, and the friends had time to look in each other's faces, and realize they were all together and safe.

"You have not told us how you escaped so remarkably," said they to Alice.

"Not anodder word at present," said Pallas, opening the door to the dining-room. "De weddin' fea's has not been eaten—such as it is ye mus' stan' in need of it. 'Tain't what it would have been yesterday—but I've done my bes' under the circumstances."

"Take my place, Philip. I'll lie here on this lounge, and when puss is through she can feed me."

"If missus 'll cut up his food, I'll wait on massa."

As the declining energies of the party were recruited by the dinner, their spirits rose to something of the hilarity of the previous day; if it had not been for genuine sympathy with the sorrow of the old servant, mirth would have prevailed in proportion to their past distress. An occasional exclamation, smothered in its birth, told them their host was not quite so easy as he affected to be; but he would let no one pity him, bearing his pain with fortitude.

In the center of the table stood the bride's cake, a snowy pyramid, the triumph of Pallas's skill, wreathed about with garlands. It was fair to look upon, within and without, and sweet to the taste as agreeable to the eyes.

"Dar' was de whites of fifty eggs beaten up in dat cake," its maker declared, in an aside to Virginia.

"Then I should call it a very egg-sensive and egg-stravagant article," remarked Mr. Raymond, who had heard the assertion.

"'Tain't any too nice for de bride it was made fer, masser."

"There's a ring in it," said Alice, as she performed the duty of the occasion by cutting the cake. "Who has it?"

Everybody took their piece with curiosity, and finally Mr.

Irving held up the golden circlet, giving, at the same time, a glance toward Virginia, too expressive to be misunderstood.

"You'll be married next, Mr. Irving, and we hold ourselves all invited to the wedding," said Mrs. Raymond.

"I hope I may be," replied that gentleman, with a second glance toward the bride-maid; but she was looking to her plate and did not seem to hear him.

Virginia had pursued the art of flirtation too long to abandon it at once.

As they lingered over the closing cup of coffee, Alice related the circumstances which had probably saved her life. It seemed she could not endure to dwell upon the terror of her flight in that wild maniac's arms, passing it over as briefly as possible.

"When I had given up all hope of rescue, and felt as if actually dying from the terror of my situation, my abductor suddenly paused, before what seemed to be a small ledge of rock, such as frequently juts out of the ground in these woods, especially near the river. Pushing aside a vine which trailed thickly before it, he thrust me into the mouth of a cave, but instead of following me in, as I expected, he drew the vine carefully over it again, and sprung away, singing:

"I'll hide the maid in a cypress-tree,
When the footstep of death is near."

"The feeling of exquisite relief which came to me in that moment was quickly superseded by the thought of his speedy return. While I stood there, trembling, waiting for him to get out of sight and hearing, in the hope that I might creep out and elude him, I heard the roar of the approaching tempest. Peering through the foliage, I felt my rocky shelter tremble, and saw the forest fall prostrate. As soon as the first shock was over, I crept out, thinking nothing but of the destruction of my friends. Too distracted to feel any personal fear, I wandered through the storm, I knew not how many hours, until, by the merest chance, a flash of lightning revealed Philip, not four feet away from me."

"The first thing you did, I suppose, was to give him a curtain-lecture, for staying out nights," remarked Mr. Raymond.

"And now, dear father, I think the roof blew off, and the house blew to pieces almost, and your arm was broken, on purpose to convince you of the necessity of spending your winter with us. It would be foolish to try to make this comfortable again, this fall. Your men can put a roof on, to protect it from the weather, and we'll leave it to its fate."

"Since he's disabled and can't defend himself, we'll take him captive," said Philip.

"Have it as you like, children, I expect to be led around by apron-strings after this. Next spring I'll take Virginia, and come back here, and will put up the handsomest mansion that

ever graced this river-side—it shall be large enough to accommodate the whole family, present ~~and~~ prospective. You needn't color up, little girl—I was only thinking of Virginia's future spouse—eh, Virginia—what's Mr. Irving blushing for?"

"I don't know—men should never blush—it's a weakness."

"I wish I could be as unmoved as you," he whispered in her ear, for he sat by her side. "It would be more becoming to me than it is to you. Women were made to blush and tremble."

"Were they, Mr. Irving? Then you'd better leave those things to them, and not be intruding upon their sphere."

"Perhaps I shall obey you, Miss Moore," he said, recovering all his coolness.

She felt that he was a man not to be trifled with. Sensitive and full of sensibility as he might be, he was not the man to let a woman put her foot on his neck. He might worship the foot, but he would not submit to be trampled upon by it. He would love, truly and deeply, but he must be respected and loved in return. His was just the spirit fitted to take the reins and curb the too headstrong and willful disposition of Virginia—under the control of a wise and gentle nature like his, her faults might change into virtues.

Philip was secretly regarding them, delighted to see how soon he recovered his self-possession, and how quietly he made his companion feel it. He saw that she fretted under it, and finally, giving up, exerted herself to be friendly and agreeable.

"They will be well matched. I never saw a better mate for my naughty cousin. I had an idea of it, when I invited him to act as groomsman. She'll be a good while giving up, though."

That Virginia would not yield to this new mastership very soon was evident. When they had left the dining-room, and were standing on the portico, Mr. Irving desired to place the ring which had fallen to him upon her finger—but she refused with considerable *hauteur*.

"I only desired you to wear it for safe-keeping. It's a lady's ring, and I don't know what to do with it. Mrs. Raymond, will you accept it?"

He placed it on the finger of the married lady with as pleasant an air, as if it had been accepted when he first offered it.

"I ought not to wear it; give it to some fair maiden."

"There is but one, and she will not have it. If there were others, I should certainly offer it. So you see it is chance only that has left it to you."

"Well, I'm not very much flattered, Mr. Irving—but the ring is just as pretty, and I ought to be thankful to chance."

So the ring was lost to Virginia, without the satisfaction of her having annoyed the one who offered it.

CHAPTER XV.

BEN AND ALICE.

"Now that the wedding-feast is disposed of, I must remind you all that there is yet work to be done. I have not heard from the mill; and poor old Saturn must be searched for, as well as that unfortunate young man who has made us so much trouble. It frets me to think I can do nothing. Philip, you must do service in place of my broken arm."

The party were making ready to go out again, when two or three men came from the mill, to inquire after the family, and to relate to the captain the story of the vast damage his property had sustained.

"Oh, what is de riches of dis worl', masser," said Pallas, as she, too, paused from her work to hear their interesting narrative of wreck and chaos upon every side, with accounts which had reached them from people further down, where the tornado had made a yet more terrible visitation. "What is de riches of dis worl', when a bref of de Almighty can sweep 'em away like as dey were dust and trash. My ole masser he turn you 'way, 'cause yer had no riches, and your chile-wife, she die of grief; and you come out here and work and work in de wilderness half as long as de chilen of Israel—and you set your foot down you will be rich, and your chile shall have much to gib her husband when she got one—and de storm come, and all yer pine-trees is laid low, and yer mill-wheel is broken at de fountain, and your riches pass 'way in de whirlwind."

"It's time for me to begin thinking of these things I suppose, Pallas. But, as to my losses—I can stand 'em. My wood-choppers must work briskly this winter, among this fallen timber—and as for the old mill, I think it has gone to pieces to hasten the fulfillment of my plan of erecting a steam-mill in its place. I've worked for Alice, and now I must work for Virginia."

"Let us, at least," said the clergyman, who was standing by, "be reminded of our duty by this humble colored woman—let us offer up thanks for our wonderful preservation."

All knelt, except the disabled raftsman, while the minister offered up a heartfelt thanksgiving, when the party set forth into the tangled forest again. Alice, who had been overcome more by anxiety than by fatigue, was so recruited, that she insisted upon going with Philip. Her familiarity with the woods she thought would enable her to trace the way to the spot where Ben would doubtless be found a corpse; the fact that he was high in the branches of a tall tree when the tempest struck the spot, making it almost certain that he was destroyed. Two or three foresters, Raymond, and Philip, followed their guide as

she wound through and climbed over matted branches and fallen trunks, pausing occasionally for some trace of the familiar aspect of yesterday. In many places the forest looked actually as if a band of giant reapers had passed that way and mowed down the trees in mighty swaths. Again, when the storm had taken a more whirling movement, the great trunks would be twisted and snapped off in long splinters, ten or twelve feet from the ground. An overwhelming sense of the terrific power of their unwelcome visitor oppressed them, as they beheld its ravages in the broad daylight.

"And yet, dear Philip, it may have been sent by Providence to save me from a fearful fate—or at least, it *did* save me, and I am grateful—oh, so grateful," whispered the young wife, as Philip assisted her over a huge tree which lay, torn up by the roots, across their path.

"It must have been somewhere about here," she said, presently.

"I am sure I have no idea of the locality," answered Philip.

"Yes! there is the ledge of rocks, and the cavern into which he thrust me. Poor Ben! I forgive him all. I hardly dare go on—I am afraid I shall see some dreadful sight;" and she shuddered.

"Perhaps you had better rest yourself, while we search this vicinity closely."

"Oh, no! I am too nervous to be left alone. I will keep by your side," and she clung to his arm, growing paler every moment, and scarcely daring to look before her.

"Hush!" exclaimed one of the foresters, half an hour later, turning back toward the young couple who were some distance behind. "Don't let her come near. We have found him; he's dead as a hammer."

Alice sat down upon a fallen tree-trunk, faint and trembling.

"Stay here, dearest, a few moments. I will come back to you;" and Philip went forward with the men to where, amid the ruins of the forest, Ben lay, a crushed and senseless human thing. He was dreadfully mutilated, and to every appearance dead. They dragged him out from under the heavy branches, and as they did so, a low groan startled them. One of the men sunk down and took the head upon his knee.

"Where's Alice?"

Ben unclosed his eyes, as he asked the question, moving them about from one face to another with a searching glance.

"I'm dying—bring her quick. Oh, do bring her, won't you?"

The gasping voice was loud and thrilling in the eagerness of its entreaty. Philip turned away and went for his wife.

"Do you think you can bear the sight?"

"If he wishes to see me, I shall not deny a dying man. He took many a step for me, in his better days—poor boy."

Ben seemed to distinguish her footsteps as she drew near. He could not stir, but his eyes turned in that direction.

"Are you cryin' for me?" he asked, as she stood by his side, the tears flowing down her cheeks like rain. "It's enough to make a man die happy to see you cryin' for him, Alice."

"Oh, Ben! I wish I could help you," she sobbed.

"I'm past earthly help, and I'm glad of it. It's the best thing could happen to a used-up fellow like me. I don't blame you for it, Alice, but I'm to blame for things I've done, and I want to ask you to forgive me. My head's been on fire for weeks. I've been in a strange state—I can't recall what I've did or said. Then I got hurt, I don't know how—and when I could think again that burning pain in my head was gone. I knew I was dyin', and I wanted to see you. I wanted to carry the picture of your face to the next world. I shouldn't be ashamed to show it to the angels—if they'll have any thing to do with a poor, ignorant fellow like me, as Pallas said they would. You're married, ain't you?"

"She is my wife," said Philip, gently, taking her hand.

"It made me crazy to think of it once; but it's over now. Alice, you've my blessin' and my wishes that you may be happy all your life. Forgive me the trouble I've made ye, and may you and him be happy long after the grass grows over poor Ben Perkins."

Alice sobbed aloud, and the rough men standing around were grave and silent. The last sentence had been spoken in a whisper, and it was evident that life was ebbing away rapidly. He closed his eyes, and the sweat gathered on the pallid face, but a short time since rich with the olive and crimson of health and youth.

"I shan't be twenty-two till next month," he whispered with shut eyes. "Put it on my tombstone, and let 'em pat on it:

"Oh his heart, his heart was broken,
For the love of Alice Wilde.'"

They stood looking at him.

"Alice—good by. Alice—where are you? Alice?"

"Here, Ben—here I am;" but she spoke to a corpse.

He died with the name of the woman he had loved with all the power of his passionate nature trembling upon his last breath.

The next day they buried him in a lovely spot on the bank of the river, and, spite of all his errors and crimes, he was not unworshipped and unammured. Once he had been gay and frank, kind and honest, handsome and merry—and the memory of his good qualities swept away the judgment passed upon his later actions.

Poor Saturn's remains were not discovered; and Pallas, with the superstition of her class, was inclined to believe that he had been translated bodily, in the chariot of the wind, to that better

world of which they had spoken so much together. It was a pleasant belief, and afforded her great consolation.

"He allers was so fond of dressin', and good clothes; and he'd been taken up in his new suit as if a-purpose to please him. Ef he'd only partaken of 'de weddin' feast', he couldn't ha' been better prepared 'an he was. Hi! hi!"

It was a picturesque-looking party which sailed away from Wilde's mill one brilliant day in September.

"One doesn't see such a bridal-party every day, or take such a bridal tour," remarked Virginia to the groomsmen by her side. "It's better than six fashionable weddings, with the usual routine. I used to have a contempt for the romantic—but I'm beginning to like it."

Yes, even the aristocratic Virginia, the beautiful metropolitan, began to be infatuated with the romance of the forest.

We may yet hear of more remarkable changes than her change of opinion. We may yet see a villa, charming as these were, to grace our lordly Hudson, rising amid the elms and birches on the banks of that fairer Western river—for love, beauty, taste, and money can accomplish wonders more surprising than making the wilderness blossom like a rose—and "out West" Aladdin's lamp is no myth.

But, for the present, we will leave this picturesque party sailing down this broad, silver river in the purple and gold of an autumn day—leave it to its joyous light, and leave that one new-made grave to its silence and shadow.

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